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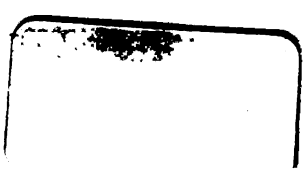
THE MARCHES OF HINDUSTAN

I



The Marches of Hindustan,

the Record of a Journey in
Thibet, Trans-Himalayan India,
Chinese Turkestan, Russian
Turkestan, and Persia

Fig. 29. Dorsal view, distant 40 m.

The Marches of Hindustan,

the Record of a Journey in Thibet, Trans-Himalayan India, Chinese Turkestan, Russian Turkestan, and Persia

BY

DAVID FRASER

AUTHOR OF 'A MODERN CAMPAIGN'

WITH 129 ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, AND SKETCHES

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MCMVII

31444

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The Snowy Mountains, from Darjeeling, distant 40 miles

The [illegible]

[illegible]

Thibet, [illegible]

China [illegible]

Terai [illegible]

DAVID [illegible]

ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS [illegible]

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Bequest of R. B. Dixon
Rec'd May 7, 1936

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TO

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FROM WHOM, WHEREVER ENCOUNTERED,

THE AUTHOR INVARIABLY RECEIVED

ASSISTANCE, COURTESY, AND HOSPITALITY.

PREFACE.

To write a book is perhaps easier than to find a title for it, and it is in despair of being able to think of anything better that I have called this volume 'THE MARCHES OF HINDUSTAN,' slender though its claim may be to so comprehensive a name. Still this title is fairly applicable, for the journey described includes the countries marching with that portion of our Indian Empire which presents frontiers conterminous with those of important states independent of British power. It is because my title suggests an exhaustive treatise on the relations between those countries and India, and because the book falls far short of that suggestion, that I feel impelled to offer apology to the reader.

It has been said that India is the head corner-stone of the fabric known as the British Empire; to put it another way—What would the British Empire be without India? What would be our position in the East if we lost India, and if it were gained by a rival? The more we contemplate the relationship between India and the rest of the Empire, the more it must be realised that our wealth and greatness in the world hinge upon the continued possession of this richest and

most populous portion of the Asiatic continent. Apparently we are quite secure in our possession; but would we have been so if Russia had beaten Japan? What is the significance of the great movement that in these days is stirring the Oriental into rebellion against the domination of Europe? Has it any bearing upon our position in India; will our occupation be as easy and simple to-morrow as it is to-day?

It is vital to our Empire to keep India. We can keep it if our people realise its importance, and are willing to make the effort. To this end it is necessary that the subject should be discussed and understood, not only by politicians and administrators, but by those who have the ultimate voice in the government of the State. It is into this discussion that I humbly venture to intrude an account of my journey in Central Asia. To the student of affairs my contribution will be of little value, for it is no more than the observations of a traveller who has endeavoured to describe what he has seen and understood of the countries and problems which have confronted him by the way.

I make no apology for inclusion of so much that is personal. A narrative is more likely to attract the interest of the general public than a long and unrelieved discussion of the series of problems involved. While relating my own peaceable adventures I have endeavoured to interpolate information regarding topography, history, economics, and strategics which, though stale to the student, may be new and instructive to the reader who has had neither time nor inclination systematically to make himself acquainted with Eastern affairs.

Owing to the wide extent of the regions discussed in the book it has not been found practicable specially to prepare a map in illustration. Mr Edward Stanford, however, has supplied an excellent map, brought well up to date, which admirably delineates the countries adjacent to India, and which should prove, except for differences in the spelling of names, an effective adjunct to the text.

I have to thank the Editors of 'The Times' and of 'Blackwood's Magazine' for permission to reproduce articles that have appeared in their respective columns, and particularly the Editor of the 'Times of India' for the free use of a series of letters which appeared in that paper under the heading of "The Diary of a Traveller."

DAVID FRASER.

CLEMENT'S INN, W.C.

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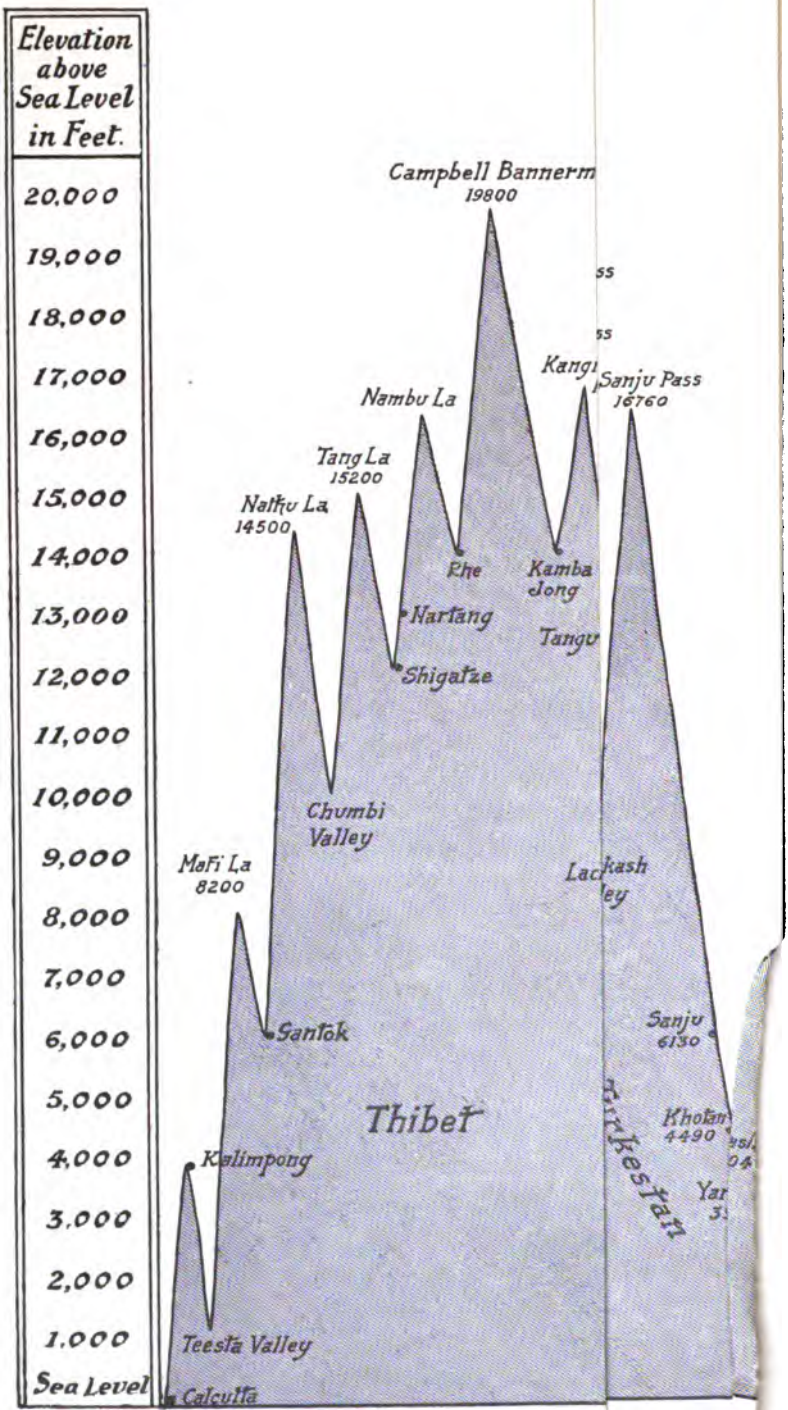
TO ILLUSTRATE THE MARCHES OF HINDUSTAN . . *Pocket at end.*

CHART.

SHOWING ALTITUDES TRAVERSED . . . . *In front.*


Elevation above Sea Level in Feet.
20,000
19,000
18,000
17,000
16,000
15,000
14,000
13,000
12,000
11,000
10,000
9,000
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
3,000
2,000
1,000
Sea Level
Campbell Bannerm
19800
Kangi
Sanju Pass
16760
Nambu La
Tang La
15200
Nathu La
14500
Phe
Kamba Jong
Narfang
Tangu
Shigatze
Chumbi Valley
Mafi La
8200
Lackash ley
Sanju
6130
Santok
Thibet
Kholam
4490
Kalimpong
Yar
Teesta Valley
Calcutta
ROUTE Total Inc

THE MARCHES OF HINDUSTAN.

THIBET.

CHAPTER I.

SIKHIM.

RAILWAY travelling in India can be as tiresome and uninteresting as in any part of the world; but there is one short journey to be made from Calcutta that, once performed, can never be forgotten. Those who have taken the night mail for Darjeeling will understand. Leaving Sealdah station late in the afternoon, one is whirled through the rich fields of Lower Bengal and, at dark, landed upon the banks of the mighty Ganges. From the dimly lit platform a string of naked coolies carries the baggage down a steep slope, across a wooden gangway, and then to the lower deck of the river steamer. Here there is a scramble for small silver coins and a retirement of the coolies. His goods deposited in safe keeping, the traveller climbs to the upper deck, a brilliantly illuminated expanse set with long dining-tables and alive with silent-footed, white-clad native servants. All around is a wall of darkness,

dotted here and there with spots of yellow, the dim lamps of passing craft. Over the rail the black water is slipping quickly but noiselessly under the thick beams of light cast upon its oily surface. The yellow spots pass mysteriously by in the distance, floating in a dark void that seems to extend beyond the vessel into infinity.

Then there comes a loud ringing of bells, a deep booming moan from the syren, and a groaning in the bowels of the boat. The great paddles churn up the water into boiling foam, the lights on the bank fall away, and the vessel is afloat upon the bosom of the Ganges. As we gather way the leadsmen take their places on either bow and call the depth in monotonous but musical tones. There is, besides, the regular beating of the engines, the intermittent plunging of the lead, and the continuous whisper of the water past the sides of the vessel as she pushes her way through the surrounding blackness. It seems desecration to eat in the midst of such enchantment, but he would be a poor traveller who failed to stimulate his powers of appreciation by food and the subsequent cigar.

Satisfied and sleepy, after an hour's voyage one lands upon the farther bank and soon finds rest upon the comfortable couches provided in the waiting train. There is a period of oblivion, and then the morning. From the windows there is still to be seen the same tree-skirted, richly green fields that adorned the neighbourhood of Calcutta. But there is something more if you put your head out of the window and look straight north. In the distance is a purple line of mountains rising sheer from the plain, and above it, hovering dim and ghostlike over these foothills, are the Snowy Mountains. If you do not know they are there, you think at first they are only clouds, but as you gaze they take shape and form, the peaks stand out, and the valleys

show like black crevasses. Perhaps if you are early enough, you will see the rising sun tint the whole range a delicate pink; wish, too, for the vulture's plumes that you might

> ". . . stretch for topmost Himalay,
> Light where the rose-gleam lingers on those snows,
> And strain the gaze with searching what is round!"

For three days I looked forth from the verandah of a tree-embowered bungalow and longed to know what there was behind the rampart of mountain that looked down upon us from the north. Three miles away Sunchonlu rose sheer out of the plain, towering up and up, until, at 7000 feet, its head was lost in the clouds. The bungalow floated in a dark-green sea composed of millions of little round tea-bushes, set in rows that gave the orderly and uniform impression of a ploughed field. Here and there were dotted the white buildings devoted to the manufacture of tea, each a small island guarded by a ring of trees. Some way off a cloud of gaily clad coolies were slowly passing through the tea, their chatter and laughter ebbing and flowing with every breath of wind. The sky was of that faint but unmistakable blue that accords with masses of fleecy white cloud. In the early morning the sun was bright and hot, yet delightful, for the surrounding green took all the fire out of its rays. Just to look forth was a satisfaction to the soul.

But contentment and mountains do not go well together. Abruptly the tea stops short, and gives way to the overhanging hills. The transition from level and peaceful plain to soaring and mysterious crag is startling, and almost takes the breath away. At one moment the mind sleeps under the influence of the sensuous surroundings, then wakes suddenly as the eye rapidly scales the distant heights and seeks

to penetrate the unknown beyond. For the imagination there is no stimulant like mountains.

Voyaging is victory, saith Richard Burton; and one cool morning in January I deemed myself a conqueror indeed, for was I not bound for the recesses of those hills whose soaring outlines captivated the eye, and whose dark ravines quickened the curiosity. It was a modest enough expedition. Only a few days' tour into Sikhim, a long gaze at the battlements of ice, then back to the fleshpots of the plains. But this brief debauch of the imagination was to have quite another ending. Instead of days in Sikhim, my little expedition was to last for months, and to extend, moreover, beyond the mountains and into that mysterious land that has been the goal of adventurous travellers since the days of Marco Polo. True, a ruthless expedition had partially torn the veil that had long hidden its secrets, but to read of what others have seen is only to stimulate the travel hunger.

The neighbourhood was that where the oft-described Teesta river debouches into the plains of India, hence Sikhim was due north, Nepal west, and Bhutan east. Not far away was a cleft in the mountains, and here the Leish river came tumbling down over rocks and boulders to find that the boisterous Teesta, which it meets in the plains, has become a reformed character, flowing calmly and decently southward to join the Ganges. Those peaceful waters had ceased to interest me, since in three days of fishing they had yielded up not a single mahseer. But I was eager to see the Leish in its earlier efforts, when with energy unabated it roars and hisses down its own narrow valley, full of the excitement and importance conferred by birth thousands of feet above sea-level.

Our party consisted of my brother Ernest and myself, and eight coolies to carry light camp equipment. The

coolies set out very early in the morning, but we could afford to be more leisurely, for there were horses to carry us for the first few miles. Cantering over the plain was like adjusting the focus of a telescope, for every moment brought us nearer to the hills, made clear details hitherto dim and uncertain, and caused magnification of the whole scene. Behind stretched the limitless green plains of Bengal, in front a chaos of mountain scenery without parallel in the world. Until actually there we could see no rift in the stupendous barrier that towered before us. The densely wooded slopes rose almost sheer out of the ground, giving an impression of precipitousness that was not dispelled until we had plunged into a narrow ravine and obtained a glimpse in profile.

The way lay along the bed of the Leish, and we soon had to discard the horses because of the roughness of the ground. The stony track crossed and recrossed the leaping torrent, sometimes clinging to the face of a bare rock that rose sheer above the stream, at other times proceeding by stepping-stones dotted precariously amid the swirling water. After two hours of tramping we overtook the coolies, who were resting at the foot of a steep hillside that had to be climbed. So far we had been rising very slowly, consultation of the aneroid showing an ascent of 1000 feet in four miles. But if we were to ravish the sights of the Himalayas we must toil in earnest. So we said farewell to the Leish, and bent our eyes upon the lofty tree-covered acclivity that towered above us and lost itself in the skies.

It needs a sound heart, good wind, and much faith to surmount a Himalayan slope. Would that there had been less flesh in the pots of the plains, was my constant wish as we groaned and sweated upwards. The coolies were not in training for such work—none but steeplejacks would be. The ascent was nearly 60 degrees, and could be accomplished only by constant tacking

backward and forward. To occupy the mind and detract attention from the labour, I began counting steps. The aneroid said 750 feet for 1000 steps. After 2000 steps I imagined myself in eternity—not in that department which provides harps and golden streets, but the other, in which my task was climbing for ever, with a hundredweight of lead on each foot, a feather bed over my mouth, and a boa-constrictor twined round my heart.

Nevertheless voyaging is victory, for the triumph of perceiving the gorge below one's feet gradually contract in size, and of beholding the expanding view, are joys to the heart which compensate for infinite labour. At one moment a beetling crag on the opposite mountain appals one by its precipitous grandeur. A thousand steps more and one looks across to realise that the towering rock below has stood out of the hillside to form a shelf upon which nestles a human habitation surrounded by patches of green cultivation. With the glasses one can see smoke ascending, a woman at the door, children playing, and folk working in the fields. And then between the shoulders of the hills to the south one catches a glimpse of the broad plains of India, the eye covering at a glance country that holds and feeds a million of people, perhaps five millions, for the horizon is far distant and the expanse as populous as any in Bengal.

When the aneroid says 4000 feet we are on the top of a ridge that separates two deep valleys, one holding the tumbling Leish and the other streaked by the foaming water of the Teesta. A couple of miles by a path which switch-backs up and down the serrated edge of the ridge and we strike a tiny forest bungalow—a curious return to the artificial after a feast upon things natural. Milk and eggs are here forthcoming, and these, with the creature comforts borne by the coolies, form a meal that can only be comprehended by those who toil incessantly for eight hours during the heat of the day.

But the morning dwarfs the sensations of the previous day. Clouds and mist had shrouded the surrounding hills as we marched along the ridge in the evening, prohibiting a view of the distant mountains. This morning the atmosphere was dazzlingly clear, and upon waking from well-earned sleep, through the open door of the bungalow our eyes unwittingly rested on a dim grey line on the northern horizon. From this nebulous appearance there suddenly shone several points of pure white, and we realised that the morning sun was rising upon the Snowy Mountains, to see which very sight people travel round the globe. Kinchinjunga, Pandim, Kubra, and the others of this unequalled range of peaks, lay before us, and we watched the pale colours come and go as the rays of the sun travelled slowly and imperceptibly down their snow- and glacier-covered slopes.

Eyes glutted with the perfection of massed rock, snow, and ice, we literally tumble over a precipice down into a deep green gorge below the little forest bungalow. Three thousand feet of a drop in less than a mile, and covered under the hour, shakes body and soul. At the bottom of the gulf knees are trembling and nerves are all to pieces. A partridge roused from the undergrowth goes off with a roar of wings, startling one as much as might an armed Cossack springing from an ambuscade. We had to wait an hour for the coolies, sitting meantime on a boulder in the bed of a leaping torrent. Just below three streams joined, forming a deep green pool surrounded by a fringe of boiling foam. On all sides towered dark-green forest, hiding mountains that ascended 5000 to 8000 feet, and shutting out all but a patch of blue sky. The hot sun lit up only one side of this cleft in the hills, leaving the others in deep shade. . . . . thus to feast the senses who would not be willing to suffer some weariness of the flesh!

Then an hour's scramble in the bed of a river, after which one of those big green slopes is tackled again, bringing toil to the body and delight to the spirit as we gradually unfold the immense panorama of hill and valley, and realise the infinite variety and perfect harmony of nature's colouring. Nor is the way lacking in refreshment for the body. Here for the first time we encountered little parties of men and women bearing enormous baskets, from the woven sides of which there gleamed the yellow and gold of ripe fruit. Investigation proved them freshly plucked oranges, and the proffer of a two-anna piece resulted in four beauties coming into my possession. I thought I knew the taste of an orange, having eaten them everywhere between Sylhet and California, Bloemfontein and Damascus. But for ability to reach the innermost soul give me the orange of Sikhim, handed by a brown-eyed, copper-coloured Lepcha maid, and eaten on a hillside bathed in drops from your own perspiring brow.

Oranges galore, and longing intense to reach one stage nearer the Snowy Mountains, have their due consequence, and once more the aneroid reads 4000 feet, while Kalimpong, that quaintest of Himalayan townships, reflects the brilliant sunlight a few miles along the ridge. We spent a night in the hospitable home of Dr Graham, and in the morning inspect his crowds of happy barelegged urchins, male and female, who have been rescued from the slums of Calcutta, and from the degradation that overtakes the destitute whites and Eurasians of big Indian cities. We engage regular hill coolies at Kalimpong, and a skilled cook, who commits us to further stores, as the regions into which we are about to penetrate provide no food of any kind.

Now we plunge again into the depths of the valleys, this time into the gorge of the Teesta, upon whose banks we march for some miles along a fine road, specially

Sikhim—Lepcha Man and Wife.

Sikhim Swing.

Bhutias—Three Generations.

renovated to accommodate the traffic of the recent expedition into Thibet. One night in a dak bungalow, adjoined by telegraph and dak offices, and then we leave the road to pursue its well-ordered way to Gantok, while we enter the genuine, wild, uncivilised Sikhim, where paths climb ladders, cross rivers by bamboo bridges, descend and ascend 3000 feet to cross a valley half a mile wide, and generally proceed along the line of most resistance. Our tent now becomes a necessity, and haggling for eggs, milk, and chickens a daily pleasure. Oranges have become an essential of existence. From four for two annas their price has dwindled to sixteen for an anna, bought on the road, and thirty-two for an anna if taken under the trees upon which they grow. Whenever we come to one of the rich golden groves that every now and then flare out upon the olive hillsides, we call a halt of our train and order four-annas' worth of fruit, to be eaten on the spot. In the heat of the day the coolies have discarded all superfluous clothing, and the effect of the oranges upon them reminds one of the appearance of the pizened pup of fable. But ups and downs of thousands of feet speedily rectify errors in the figure, and an hour after eating the oranges they looked as attenuated as ever.

The Teesta Valley is a favourite haunt of the famous Himalayan butterfly. In winter comparatively few are to be seen, and these of limited variety. Sixty years ago Hooker penned the following lines, which for descriptive power and artistic appreciation are likely to remain unrivalled. Writing of the Teesta Valley in his 'Himalayan Journals,' he says: "But by far the most striking feature consisted in the amazing quantity of superb butterflies, large tropical swallow-tails, black, with scarlet or yellow eyes on their wings. They were seen everywhere, sailing majestically through the still hot air, or fluttering from one scorching rock to another, and

especially loving to settle on the damp sand of the river edge; where they sat by thousands, with erect wings, balancing themselves with a rocking motion, as their heavy sails inclined them to one side or the other, resembling a crowded fleet of yachts on a calm day."

Not the least attractive feature of travelling in Sikhim is the variety of people one encounters. Their dress, ornaments, and physiognomy differ widely, suggesting divergence in race and temperament unexpected in a country of such limited extent. The aborigines of Sikhim are Lepchas; but these are now in a minority, owing to the influx of Nepalese, Bhutanese, Thibetans, and natives of India. These again are divided into numerous tribes, castes, and sects, each one of which dresses distinctively, and frequently possesses a distinct type of countenance and a separate language. Amongst my coolies were men who knew Hindustani, Lepcha, and two other dialects. But as we travelled north into Sikhim we often came to hamlets where not one of them could open communication with the inhabitants. Anybody who could speak Hindustani I hailed as a friend and brother, indeed as a civilised person who knew the same world that I knew. But such were few and far between.

Anything so rough and wild as the tracks in some parts of Sikhim we had never before encountered. Ponies or animal transport, of course, were quite out of the question, only carriers with hands to help them over difficulties being possible. Cane erections, less safe than the Bridge of Sighs, are the usual means of crossing rivers, while bamboo ladders, built to all appearances in some year B.C., the only way to surmount the precipices that frequently barred the way. Over rocks the most astoundingly primitive contrivances assist the path, a notched bamboo leaning against fifteen feet of cliff, a fallen tree blazed along its length to bridge a landslip, and so forth,—

Our baggage coolies crossing the Mafi La—see page 12.

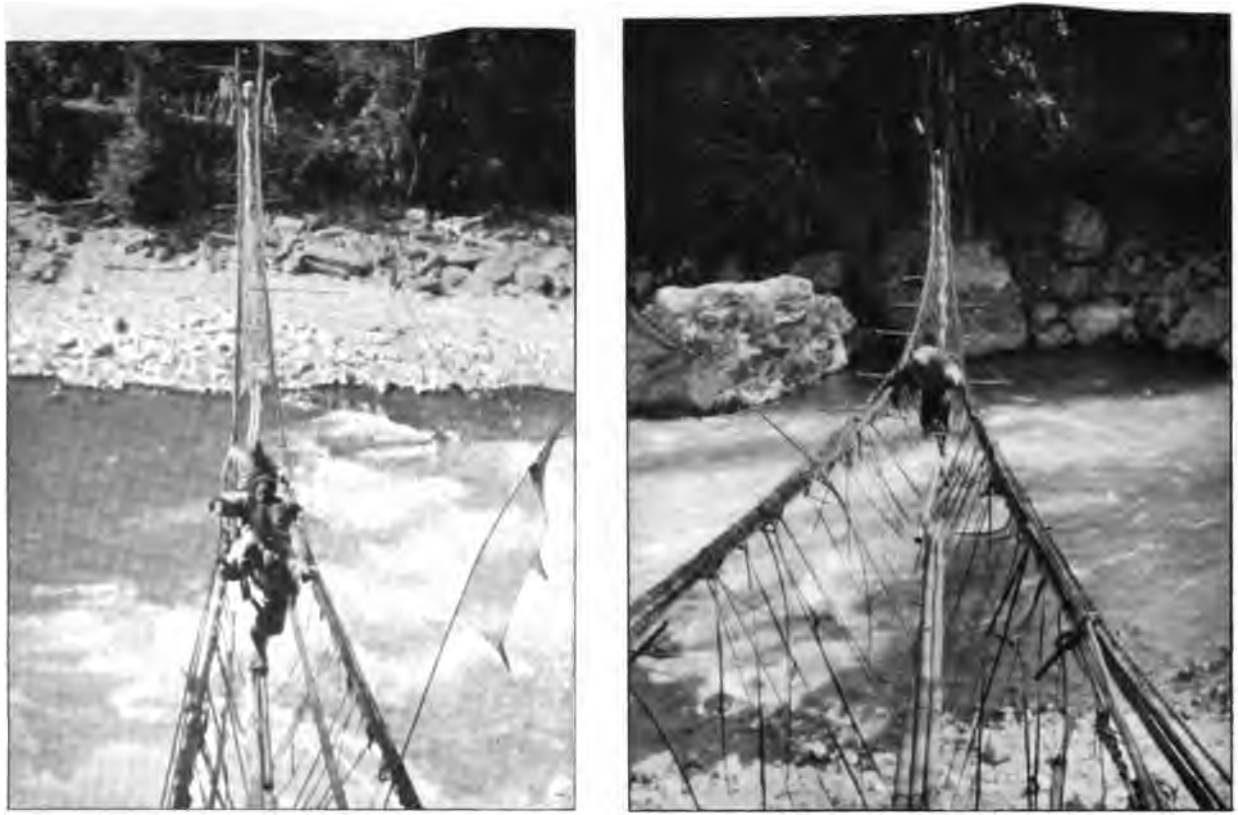
Sikhim—Cane Bridge over the Teesta,—see page 10.

excellent devices for people who never wear boots, but very puzzling to soles with steel bits or iron nails. Indeed for mountaineering pure and simple, for positive danger and abundant excitement, I commend the reader to an unfrequented hill-track in Sikhim.

In such country the endeavour to make a short cut is likely to lead to consequences. We formed an ambition to cross a particular mountain-range by a road which did not appear on the map, but the topographical situation seemed so clear that we decided to venture. The coolies were gradually enticed away from human habitation and then faced with the alternative of starving on the mountain slope or climbing according to our wish. Protest was loud, of course; but the Sahib is notoriously an incorrigible brute with whom there is no arguing, and besides he has watches and compasses and other damnable contrivances in little boxes that keep the devils and demons of death and destruction at bay. And there would be buksheesh at the end. So we started up a narrow track into the jungle. There was just enough semblance of a path to guide our footsteps. After 3000 feet of climb, and the exhaustion of daylight and the strength of the coolies, it was clear enough that we were lost, and that as we were going it was next door to impossible to cross the mountain ahead. So we camped before an enormous bonfire and waited for the morning.

Daylight revealed our position on the glacis of a great mountain, but failed entirely to show a way through the jungle to any of the villages we could see in the far distance. Our height was about 4000 feet, so we were tantalised with a handsome view of the surroundings. But while arguing as to a plan of campaign a charcoal-burner, who had seen our bonfire of the night before, came along to investigate the mystery. This brave pioneer was hired as a guide, and he, to our delight, volunteered to lead us over our mountain-range. And

he did. On hands and knees we climbed 4200 feet, over landslips, mountain torrents, fallen trees, and at last reached a path which crossed the Mafi La, 8200 feet by the aneroid. Such a grind is seldom vouchsafed to mere man, but I would not have missed a thorn scratch or a rock bruise, though my body was an emporium of both, gained on that delightful lost day. During it we touched snow for the first time, and in the pass felt the brain compression consequent on high altitude, a slight headache that soon wore off on descending the opposite side. And we had a magnificent view at comparatively close quarters of the immense expanses of snow and glacier that clothe Kinchinjunga and his brethren from head to foot. The Mafi La was our turning-point, for from here we swung south, with the intention of returning to India. But at Gantok circumstances fell so that we were able to extend our journey into Thibet.



Showing construction of Cane Bridge– the bamboos forming the footway lie loose within loops made of strands of bark.

CHAPTER II.

ENTERING THIBET.

GANTOK is by no means a city within the accepted meaning of the word, though it is the capital of a country boasting an independent ruler. Whether "Independent Sikhim," as it is styled in the books of the Government of India, is really ruled by the Rajah or by the British Resident, is a matter that does not concern the aspirant to honours as a Thibetan traveller. All we cared was that nobody expressed the intention of arresting us on account of our declared proposal to cross the Nathu La into Chumbi. This is no such simple matter, judged by the letter of a Government official at Darjeeling, who threatened me with "criminal prosecution" for entering Sikhim without leave, but graciously assured me of official protection on payment of two rupees. Gantok contains the palace of the Rajah, the home of the Resident, the barracks of a company of British native infantry, and a few shops where you may buy grain, oranges, potatoes, and a few horrors in the shape of aged tinned goods.

The few houses necessary to such a community are perched on the tail of a mountain spur that stands over 6000 feet above sea-level, and pokes its nose into a sea of broken country consisting of valleys 5000 feet down below, and hills 8000 feet above. Such a view as Gantok commands entitles it to be considered the most grandly

situated capital of any country in the world. Behind Gantok, in addition to the lovely vista of deep green valley and forest-clad mountain, there floats in the heavens the vision of eternal snow, sometimes a whirling mass of vapour, at other times a dim succession of ghosts upon the distant horizon, and anon a dazzling, blinding collection of pure white pinnacles and pyramids.

Gantok's greatest claim to notice in these present times is that it is the threshold of the entrance to Thibet. Here are based the detachments of soldiers stationed at Chumbi, Phari, and Gyantse. Our Political Officer at Chumbi and the Trade Agent at Gyantse are both directly subordinate to the Political Officer of Sikhim, who, as already mentioned, dwells at Gantok. At Gantok a Government servant Thibetward bound, civil or military, must provide himself with new and ponderous clothes or die of shivers crossing the Pass, or of pneumonia when arrived in Thibet. And at Gantok the merest layman must do likewise, or suffer one or other of the aforesaid penalties. One poor gentleman ignored Gantok's claims to the sartorial re-equipment of persons crossing the boundary-line. He was an American savant whom our Government permitted to enter Thibet on scientific intent. But he would have none of the lamb's-wool undershirts or quilted pyjamas, and so his bones to-day lie in Gyantse.

This is what they served out to us, and what we took with the utmost gratitude: Gilgit boots—like thigh-high fishing-boots made of felt—fur poshteen, fur-lined gloves, padded pyjamas, thick woollen undershirt and pants, an enormous quilted resai weighing a stone, Balaclava cap, &c. I understand that when the troops crossed the Jelap La, they wore all these things. By special dispensation we avoided that error and employed several coolies to carry them, with the result that we escaped dissolution at the very beginning of our journey. Fearful tales were

Jemadar Shahzad Mir—see page 67.

My brother Ernest equipped for Thibet.

told us in Gantok of the hardships of crossing the dreaded pass into Chumbi, especially in the month of January, when the cold was greatest and the snowdrifts deepest. With alarm we read the harrowing accounts of correspondents who had accompanied the expedition to Thibet two years before. Worst of all was the dreaded mountain sickness, which was calculated to abstract a man's senses, along with the contents of his stomach, and generally to render him a raving lunatic, possibly for life.

We left Gantok with heavy hearts, and the assurance of encountering snow within three miles. But we completed the first day's stage without finding snow, and the second with a similar result, the only thing suggestive of cold being a frozen lake at 12,000 feet. The second night was distinctly chilly, but in the morning the sun was bright and hot, and during the third day we crossed the dreaded Nathu La in our shirt-sleeves and in the same kit we had worn when leaving the plains. There was no snow, and up to the top of the pass not a breath of wind. Nor were we sick or headachy. Then I scoffed at all I had read and heard—and suffered the usual fate of scoffers. Prancing down the reverse slope I was struck suddenly by a blast that made me doubt the stability of the features of my face, and forced me to don coat and waistcoat with indecent haste. Next I was taken in the loins and temples with feelings which God forbid that my worst enemy may ever suffer. I found myself reeling about in a manner that would have done credit to a bank-holiday roysterer. As the beginning of the descent from the pass is very steep, and consists of a zigzag track carved out of a precipitous decline, I began to fear falling over the edge and reaching the bottom of the ravine at a speed inconsistent with dignity and safety. Accordingly I lay down on the path, and went into a sort of trance, during which I was unable to move hand

or foot. As the track was only three or four feet broad, my legs strayed completely across it, and I was in such a condition of helplessness that I continued to lie still while a string of pack-horses came along and stepped gingerly, one after the other, over my prostrate body. It was half an hour before I recovered sufficiently to resume walking, and it was with great thankfulness I soon afterwards reached a rest bungalow and lay down to ease a terrible headache, the result of blood-pressure on the brain consequent on the rarefied atmosphere. In the middle of my own trouble I had forgotten all about my brother. He walked behind me for some time thinking how stupid it was to see a man losing control of himself for, apparently, no reason at all. But his criticism was soon silenced by a severe attack of the same complaint, and altogether he did his full share of penance. If a London policeman had come along at the time we would most assuredly have been arrested as drunk and incapable.

Next day we tramped gaily into Chumbi none the worse for having evened Mont Blanc, and not at all conscious of continuing existence at a height of 12,000 feet. Nevertheless, having accomplished the feat of walking over the Nathu La, we were to be content thereafter to ride horses, and to save our wind for more serious purposes than mere locomotion.

At Chumbi we were hospitably entertained by the Political Officer, Captain Campbell, who took us to visit all the sights in the neighbourhood, including the Chinese wall at Yatong, and other places connected with the advent of the Younghusband Mission. We were also accorded the privilege of making the acquaintance of Miss Annie Taylor, the missionary lady so long resident on the borders of Thibet, and whose gallant endeavours to reach Lhasa have excited admiration. Nor must I forget the visit to the Chinese officials at Phema and their

Frozen Waterfall in the Chumbi Valley.

Chumolari, 23,930 feet.

cordiality when I produced my card in Chinese characters, and conveyed to them the information that I had been in China lately, and knew by chance the birthplace of one of my hosts. Surely there is no nationality with such frank and friendly manners as the Chinese. Their ability to be disagreeable is particularly well known in these days, but what is admirable in the Chinaman is that his manners always express his true sentiments. If he dislikes you and your people, the feeling is undisguised in his behaviour. But if he is friendly at heart, then his cordiality is both charming and affecting. That at least has been my experience of the Chinese, gained in intimate relations with them during the last three years.

Chumbi to Phari, 14,300 feet, has been amply described by those writers of books who gained their opportunity through the Expedition. It remains for me to say that whatever has been written in detestation of Phari is abundantly true, and in no wise exaggerated. The uncleanliness of the people perhaps has been dwelt upon rather noticeably, but a temperature in the morning of 9½ degrees below zero speedily developed my sympathy with Thibetans who disincline to water. In fact, my sympathy on the second day at Phari led me into emulation of their leading sin of omission. Perhaps we were prejudiced against Phari, but not without reason. We lived in the ruined jong for a week, during which time we never once ceased shivering. From Phari we climbed 2000 feet after a herd of burhel, that when we started were peaceably feeding—to find them gone. Another day we climbed a hill 18,000 feet high, and nearly died of the experience.

In Phari there is only one good thing—Chumolari Mountain. Bride of Kinchinjunga the name implies, and anything more beautiful or more stately could hardly be conceived. One catches the first glimpse of her snow-covered white-rocked top when passing through a gorge

leading from the Chumbi Valley. From Hooker's exquisite description one recognises it at once, and is struck dumb with admiration. Bare hillsides and dark forbidding rock surround one when laboriously rising to the Phari Valley. The wind sweeps down the ravines, rendering vegetation abortive and trees impossible. Nothing but desolation appears in front, until one suddenly turns a corner to find the wedge of blue sky in the scene ahead filled by a wondrous shimmering cone pointing heavenward, like a great diamond set between the shoulders of the hills. Chumolari is moderate in height compared with the peaks in the great range forming the northern boundary of Sikhim. But 23,930 feet is no mean height, and dwarfs most mountains not of the Himalayas. Chumolari is the apex of a great snow-covered range that forms the boundary between Bhutan and Thibet, culminating in the less distinctive but loftier Kulakangri, 24,740 feet, a hundred miles farther east. Seen from Darjeeling or any part of Sikhim, only Chumolari of this range is visible, her mighty slopes and elegant conical head completely blocking out the series of peaks in line behind.

Phari, when we arrived, was preparing to receive the Tashi Lama on his little expected return from the Indian tour. All had been weeping and wailing when he passed south; now the people were smiling and happy to know that he was already in Thibet, and soon to give them a blessing as he returned homeward to Shigatse. They had deemed their spiritual head doomed when he ventured across his own border, and themselves lost sinners since their protection against the powers of darkness had been inveigled into a far country. But with anxiety now relieved they gaily prepared to welcome him back, building innumerable little altars on the road, and marking off with stones space in which his sacred equipage might safely travel.

On arrival of the Lama we met Lieutenant Bailey, the acting Trade Agent at Gyantse, and Captain Steen, medical officer to the Agency, who were accompanying the Lama to his home. With them were Captain Fitzgerald of the 18th Bengal Lancers, and A.D.C. to Lord Kitchener. A telegram to the Foreign Office at Calcutta requesting permission to accompany this party was replied to in the affirmative, and it was with much joy and thankfulness that I prepared to extend my journey. Unfortunately my brother was compelled to return to India, but he had had such a taste of the cold and other discomforts that perhaps he was not altogether sorry.

Before leaving Phari we enjoyed an amusing and delightful exhibition of Thibetan temper. There was a quarrel among the transport drivers of Chumbi and Phari, in which the headman of the latter was maltreated. There ensued a declaration of war between the two parties, and hostilities commenced without delay and amidst great uproar, chiefly contributed by the women. The weapons employed were stones, rocks, bricks, mud, and abuse, all of which darkened the air until a squad of the 3rd Brahmans with fixed bayonets appeared on the scene. The young sepoys had never seen service, and so fell in with great excitement, doubtless anticipating scalps and loot. But since 1904 Thibetans have learned discretion, and at sight of cold steel the riot subsided.

From Phari we went north across the Tang La, 15,200 feet, and in due time arrived at the Tuna plain, of which members of the Expedition must cherish melancholy recollection. Flat as a billiard-table and swept by wind, it is the barest and most inhospitable region on earth. Yet it was full of life, teeming with wild ass and gazelle, and furnishing abundant nourishment to numerous herds of yaks that diligently cropped the scanty but rich grass. Here we saw a wolf sneaking after gazelle. Farther on

value, as has the frozen carcass of a sheep, a skinful of rancid butter, a roll of smelly cloth, and a few other things. Prominent among these is argol, which, in sacks weighing about a maund, is worth the equivalent of twenty shillings per ton. A countryman paying rent to his monastic proprietors thus comes laden with a collection of odorifics which in more sophisticated regions would procure him a month in jail. The value of argol has given rise to a very important point in Thibetan etiquette. When travelling nobody carries fuel, but counts on being able to pick it up on the camping-ground at the next stage, where to take what might be found without leaving provision for the next comer would be considered a great breach of good manners.

The Tuna plain tests patience and temper for nearly two days, and then the traveller experiences a change of country. From journeying in the open we are forced into the surrounding hills by the presence of the Bham Tso, a broad lake frozen in winter, and, I think, salt. Where the plain merges into the lake the ground is one immense swamp, hard at present, but an impassable bog in summer. Here we encountered duck for the first time, and Bailey bagged a couple of fat mallard. Gazelle so far had been very hard to shoot, and we had not bothered about them. They generally took alarm at 250 yards, and scampered far out of range. One lot of ten bolted while I was stalking them, and galloped in single file across my flank. After two days of vain endeavour to get a shot I was reduced to the unsportsmanlike resort of browning the herd. Putting the sight of the rifle up to 500 yards, I aimed at the leader and fired. The fourth in the line fell out and lay down. So far as I had been able to judge they were all bucks, but my reward for violating unwritten law was an unhappy little doe. She proved, however, very sweet in the eating.

Beyond Bham Tso lies another lake called Kala Tso,

the two being connected by a narrow stream in which we found duck. As we rode along the gorge we were greatly excited to observe *Ovis ammon* on a crest some 2000 feet up. We tossed for the chance, and Fitzgerald and Steen were soon wending their way up the mountain-side eager to get a shot at this rare and timid sheep, whose head is one of the most coveted trophies obtainable in the wild countries north of the Himalayas. They travelled some enormous distance round a peak, and on arrival at the ground found the brutes gone. In this part of the world the experience of sportsmen had been that *ammon* will go forty miles after scenting danger, though afterwards we had reason to modify this opinion. Meanwhile Bailey and myself had good sport with hare, duck, and snow-pigeon.

Out of the Kala Tso flows the Nyang Chu, the stream which waters the Gyantse Valley and enters the Tsangpo, or Brahmaputra, at Shigatse. Along its banks we had tremendous sport with our guns, bagging duck of several varieties, woodcock, teal, hare, and partridges in great number. We also saw a herd of burhel, but could not get within range. The river mostly flowed in a defile commanded by the road high up on the hillside. From the road we examined the river with glasses, and found duck at nearly every bend. One of us, by turns, directed the other three from the road, one walking up the duck while one up and another down stream shot the birds that escaped the first man. Arriving early one afternoon at a village, Fitzgerald and myself went out after tea to prospect. A local sport led us along a rocky ridge with great *impressement*, and sure enough, in a field below, we spotted a covey of partridges roosting for the night. On being walked up, they raced into an adjacent patch of cover, along which we drove them. At the tail of the cover they rose, and we got five with the four barrels. The remainder flew up the hillside, and after a severe

scramble we found them again and followed until they rose, bagging two or three. They now returned to their original cover, and we repeated the operation as before, continuing until we bagged the whole of the covey, thirteen in number. Meanwhile the villagers had been attracted by the firing, and crowded round, fighting for possession of the empty cartridges, and greatly encumbering our movements. How none were shot I cannot imagine, for they delighted in roving about in front of the guns, and in popping up unexpectedly when we were about to shoot.

In camp one night Bailey took me to the Lama's tent, and I had the honour of being introduced to his Holiness, which I understand is the equivalent of his title in Thibet. After our primitive quarters the warm and luxurious Mongolian *akoi* was delightful, its richly embroidered hangings and silken cushions suggesting the pavilions of the Arabian Nights. The frame-work consists of walls and dome of lattice work, over which are spread several layers of cloth, and over all a cover of leopard skins. Inside, the woodwork is concealed by the hangings, which blaze with Oriental colour, and by the pictures woven in silk and satin that are so prominent a feature of Buddhist ornamentation. The tent, I was told, was presented to the Lama by a Mongolian prince.

The manners of the Lama are of that gentle and kindly variety which one associates with ecclesiastical dignitaries. He appears to be entirely devoid of personal conceit, and to be unconscious of the exalted place he occupies in the eyes of Buddhists all the world over. Quite simply he said he was glad to know that I had joined his party, and hoped the hardships of the road would not be too great for me. He was very interested to know that I had seen something of the Russo-Japanese war, about which he made many inquiries. Bailey and he are exactly of an age, in consequence of which they are great friends, Bailey's knowledge of the Thibetan

A Thibetan Family at Shigatse.

The Tashi Lama's akoi, with leopard-skin covering—see page 24.

language greatly contributing to this desirable result. The tastes of the Lama run markedly in favour of photographs and, strangely enough for such a champion of peace, guns. Of these he was bringing several different kinds from Calcutta, and is never tired of being instructed in their mechanism. One interesting discovery I made. We were comparing the temperature of India with that of Thibet, and remarking upon the necessity for plenty of clothes in the latter. I asked the Lama if he ever felt the cold. He laughed, and for reply turned up his petticoats and displayed a bifurcated garment—lined with ermine. Explorers bound for the Pole, and others concerned in fashionable intelligence, should note.

After a week of travel we reached Gyantse, where a tremendous concourse of the faithful awaited the Lama, including the detachment of the 3rd Brahmans stationed here for the protection of the Trade Agent. Fitzgerald and myself were greatly interested in the surroundings, which bore many traces of the siege sustained by the Expedition prior to its reinforcement and advance to Lhasa. The present little garrison makes heroic efforts to grow vegetables, and to put a very awkward place in a proper state of defence.

The jong which commands the quarters of the Agency is situated something like Edinburgh Castle. The buildings crown a lofty rock, and the citadel is approached along a spur in rear, which enables communication to be maintained with the town behind. After the capture of the jong it was dismantled so far as such a mass of masonry can be destroyed, and now presents rather a melancholy appearance despite efforts at restoration. It is curious to find this enormous building uninhabited, with the exception of a small gompa, where two or three lamas serve diligently. These good men received us in the most kindly manner, showed all their treasures, and

took us into their private quarters, which were as simple and decent as one might imagine were those of a monk of the Middle Ages, and probably as clean. They rejoiced in the present of a rupee which, I would fain believe, they will spend in the service of their temple. From the walls of the jong we looked down upon a rectangular enclosure dignified by the title of "shooting-range." Here was a target which allowed practice at a hundred yards distance and no more. After hostilities ceased the Thibetans woke up to the necessity for some degree of military reform, and the local Arnold Forster set about the work with characteristic energy, causing beautiful repairs to be made to the wholly unnecessary walls of the range. It is not recorded that he provided soldiers. Curious it is that the Asiatic conception of military measures should be confined to the provision of fortification and equipment, and should take little note of the prime factor in warlike preparation—efficiency in the *personnel*. From Persia to China the same weakness is exhibited, prompting the reflection that Europe will have cause to rue the day it dawns upon the patient and enduring Oriental wherein lies the main reason of his inability to cope with the Occident.

Gyantse town is small beer, half the population consisting of lamas, who though important in Thibet, come low in the human scale. Of the remainder a few are merchants, but the great majority are people who make a living by the transportation of goods by yak, mule, or pony. In a village near the town is a manufactory of carpets. These are of fine quality, all pure wool, and occasionally the colour and pattern partake of the richness and grace of the East. But art, never very highly developed, is decadent in Thibet, and the increase in the demand occasioned by the purchases of officers who have visited the country within the last three years has caused

Gyantse Town from the top of the Jong.

A Street in Gyantse.

a corresponding drop in quality. The carpets are really no more than mats, the biggest I saw measuring about six feet by three. Owing, however, to the fact that no stock is kept, and that only a very few were available for my inspection, it is possible that I did not see their best work, and that the makers are capable of better things.

The transition from the Tuna plain and corresponding levels to the comparatively low-lying Gyantse Valley is particularly interesting. For the first-mentioned region is of the bleak and barren plateau which explorers have taught us to associate with Thibet, and which Expeditional writers have described in accents of holy terror. But the other is a new world, difficult to recognise from what has been written about Thibet. Tuna is nearly 15,000 feet above the sea, and is overlooked by the eternal snows of the Chumolari range in the east, and by the main range of the Himalayas in the west. From these frosty heights a bitter wind sweeps across the plain, and under the shadow of the chilly mountains trees cannot live nor vegetation thrive. Between Gyantse and Tuna there is a range of hills which checks the wind from the snow, while a drop of 2500 feet further contributes to a difference in temperature. Thus the valley of Gyantse awaits the traveller like an oasis in the desert. Here are trees and crops and white farmhouses surrounded by rich-soiled fields. In January agriculture is practically at a standstill, but in summer the trees are a mass of foliage and the surrounding hills green with verdure. A pleasant river meanders across the plain, and hundreds of irrigation canals streak the growing corn. In all the wide valley no inch of ground is left uncultivated. Were all Thibet like this, it must have been British or Russian long ago.

The Lama halted a day at Gyantse to bless the wicked and receive the gifts that are his due. Then we wheeled

west and rode straight to Shigatse, along the valley of the Nyang Chu. On the first day out we came to a big spinney full of hare. Forming a long line, in which our following delightedly joined, we beat the cover for two hours, and bagged a dozen. Skirting the river somebody got a brace of ducks, then somebody else took a long shot at a fox, and we all missed a horrified owl out of sheer astonishment at the expression in its eyes. Later in the day we spied a flock of geese on a water-logged field. The position was unstalkable, and so we pretended we were farmers going to our work. By this cunning device we got within shot, and as they rose gabbling we gave them all eight barrels. Unluckily we were using too small a size of shot, and so secured only seven. But, following, we got several more, and Steen brought down a couple of crane right and left. The latter, for eating, need to be kept for some time, when they make steak that cannot be told from Smithfield. For soup they are admirable. They are very shy birds, and cannot be stalked with a gun, as they rise at a hundred yards. But in flight they think themselves safe, and it is then that they give the sportsman his chance. Before reaching camp we shot more ducks, some woodcock, and made desolate a flock of snow-pigeons, ending up the day with a bag that for variety and numbers would be difficult to beat in unpreserved country.

Throughout the journey to Shigatse we had abundance of sport among small game. The valley is very flat, frequently swampy, and intersected with irrigation canals, which make moving about difficult. In summer it must be a perfect paradise for snipe and duck, while geese are present in thousands. From an agricultural point of view this valley must be very rich owing to the distribution of the water and the quality of the soil. Judging by the handsome farm-

Gyantse Gompa.

Four-horned Sheep at Gyantse.

houses, the people are well off, though I understand the ground is owned by Tashilumpo monastery. After four days of sport much like that just described we reached Shigatse. Our entry was conducted with great state and involved much interesting ceremony, the description of which deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOME-COMING OF THE TASHI LAMA.

WHEN Government invited the Lama to visit India the dovecotes of Tashilumpo were greatly flustered. No Thibetan of his position had ever been known to leave the country, and such a violation of precedent as the acceptance of the invitation entailed, struck deep at the roots of the Thibetan policy of isolation. But several causes led to serious consideration of the step.

To begin with, there were the friendly relations which have existed between the Indian Government and Shigatse since the missions of Bogle and Turner in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Thereafter our native surveyors engaged in the exploration of Thibet were invariably treated with kindness and courtesy by the lamas of Tashilumpo. In 1865, the mediation of the Tashi Lama effected the conclusion of a mutually satisfactory peace between ourselves and the Bhutanese. And finally, at Khamba Jong, in the summer of 1903, our relations with the Shigatse people were very friendly, and probably would have resulted in the settlement of all outstanding questions had not Lhasa taken up an obstructive attitude.

These things disposed the Lama to take advantage of the opportunity to visit the country to which his faith owed its origin, and his advisers pressed for acceptance of the invitation to India, particularly those who

had come into personal touch with Indian officials and were broad-minded enough to perceive the benefits which might accrue from closer relations with the Government of India. But others, who might be termed ultra-clerical, perceived in a visit to India a loosening of the bonds by which the country is held in thrall by the monasteries. A visit to a country in the forefront of civilisation could have no other effect than that of broadening the minds of everybody who went there, and of awakening them to the unreasonableness and unprofitableness of the lamaic system of government. These Little Thibetans hated the idea of any of their countrymen realising that there were greater things in the world than the power and influence of the monasteries in which they themselves were supreme, and they opposed the visit of the Lama to India with the greatest vehemence. To further their views they took the people into their confidence, and prognosticated forcible detention, slow decline, and sudden death for their adored Lama. They painted the British character in colours too horrible for reproduction in print, and generally predicted a diversion of Divine favour which would end in eternal damnation for the inhabitants of Shigatse.

But stronger influences were at work, and it was decided that the Lama, with the monster entourage inseparable from Oriental travel, should grasp the hand of friendship held out to him by the Indian Government. Local gossip has it that the Council had sat continuously for three days and three nights discussing the matter, arguments for and against being fiercely reiterated until their exponents sank exhausted to the floor, barely able to swallow their ninety and ninth cup of greasy tea. When nobody was left with voice enough to speak, one elderly officer of the Household arose and said that he knew all about the Sahibs—hadn't he drunk wine with them at Khamba Jong until purple in the face—and that

what they wanted would have to be done. If the Burra Lat at Calcutta said the Lama was to go there, then the Lama must go, and there was no use talking any more about it. Then he sat down. Nobody had anything to say to such an unanswerable argument, and so the matter ended. Whilst there may be more picturesqueness than accuracy about this version of the proceedings, there is still some truth in it. The advisability of inviting the Lama to visit India was, I understand, first suggested by Captain O'Connor, the Trade Agent at Gyantse. That hard-headed and enthusiastic officer conveyed the invitation in person, and there can be no doubt that it was greatly owing to his energetic advocacy that the Lama's advisers were prevailed upon to agree.

Nevertheless to the great bulk of the lamas, and to all the people in Shigatse and the surrounding country, the departure of their spiritual ruler was looked upon as an unmitigated calamity. The scene as he rode out of the town is said to have been most affecting, thousands of weeping men, women, and children running after his chair for miles, hoping for a last glimpse of him, possibly for a chance to touch something belonging to him. These good folk never thought to see him come back, and doubtless many of his followers had their misgivings. It has been a tradition of the Tashi Lamas that their personalities shall be acceptable and beloved of the people, and the accounts we have of them all bear out the belief that they lived gentle and virtuous lives which endeared them to their adherents. There is thus in the doings at Tashilumpo a human element which cannot but appeal to the Westerner, and which must dispose us to take a sympathetic interest in the affairs of these simple people.

Until within a day's march of Shigatse our small party of Europeans had travelled as we pleased, varying the monotony of the way by shooting and hill-climbing, and arriving in camp at our convenience.

The Tashi Lama's Summer Palace near Shigatse.

A wonderful old Willow Tree at the Summer Palace.

A Duke's Country Cottage near Shigatse.

But the Lama expressed the wish that we should join in an official entry into Shigatse, and the places assigned to us in the procession indicated that he desired publicly to proclaim the friendship he felt for British subjects, and the honour he considered due to official British representatives.

To rise at 3 A.M. of the clock, in Cimmerian darkness and at a temperature of 3 degrees below zero, is a high price to pay for a place in a procession. But it is not an everyday privilege to escort to his home, after three months' absence, the holiest personage in Thibet. After a fortnight's marching with the Tashi Lama we had reached the last stage on the road to Shigatse, and hereafter we must journey in state and prove to the faithful that our sacredness is not diminished nor our dignity decreased because of travel in far Hindustan.

Having taken the places assigned to us by the Master of the Horse, we waited for the Lama. Soon there came a rush of dark figures from the enclosure that surrounded his tent, followed by a creaking of wooden staves and the coughing of men that undertake a burden. The Lama was chaired, and the chair was in motion. Hastily we scrambled up on our little horses, some scrambling too far and having to be helped back from the other side. Stars, millions of miles away, give barely sufficient light for mounting a horse when the rider is clad in Thibetan clothes and the saddle is of China, high and narrow in the seat. We rode in the midst of heavily muffled figures, whose identity in the darkness it was impossible to distinguish. Nor are Thibetans given to the exchange of courtesies with 35 degrees of frost in the air. It was chilly work waiting for the sun, but he came at last, not yet visible because of the mountains in the east, only spreading a grey light over the dull yellow plain and the towering rocks that flanked one side of the track. It was colder than ever in this morning

dimness, and, with mouth and eyes covered, we allowed ourselves to be carried forward, merely human bundles, conscious only of the perishing air.

Then from a state of torpor one suddenly waked to find the glare of the sun blazing on a line of gorgeous figures that streamed ahead. All the colour and fancy of the Orient were displayed in the *cortége* of which we formed a part. For the moment it was hard to believe we were riding in Arctic cold, and not on the burning plains of India. Bobbing up in front were golden emblems mounted on long poles. A garish flag came next, and then the gilt and yellow chair of the Lama, followed by an immense umbrella of rose silk. The muffled figures among which we rode were clad in all the colours of the rainbow, and the saddlery of the horses dazzled the eyes. Ahead, to keep the road, were the swashbucklers, ready to belabour the slow and curse the innocent. Next came the personal attendants of the Lama, arrayed in shining garments and invested with unspeakable dignity, these mounted on long-tailed, short-legged little horses that fussed and tramped along at four miles an hour. After an interval came the Lama himself, in a chair that one might reasonably suppose was a progenitor of the Lord Mayor's coach. It was borne by twelve struggling coolies in archaic uniform, who panted and sweated like the crew of a 'Varsity boat. For them there was no rest, twenty more coolies pulling on a rope attached to the front allowing them no relaxation. The carriers were relieved at intervals, when, mounting horses, they galloped fiercely ahead for some miles to a point on the roadside, where they took their ease until the arrival of the procession signalled a resumption of labour.

On the Lama's right hand rode Lieutenant Bailey, the Trade Agent, and on the other side of the chair Captain Steen. Both went uncloaked, and as their tight-fitting

The Head of the Tashi Lama's Procession—see page 34.

Door-keeper of the Tashi Lama's private quarters at Tashilumpo.

The Tashi Lama's Mother—see page 35.

A Monk of Tashilumpo.

tunics and trousers admitted of very little clothes underneath, I momentarily expected to see them drop off their horses and break like icicles into little pieces. Behind the chair rode the Prime Minister, followed by the Abbot of Tashilumpo and the Lama's Tutor, the three chief functionaries of the Court. With them were Fitzgerald and myself, covered over with furs and clothes, and shivering like aspen leaves. Behind us rode the Lama's mother, an apple-cheeked old lady, to whose dumb and deaf condition her son owes his recognition as the reincarnation of a former self. Then followed the Agent's escort of mounted infantry, unhappy Brahmans, whose faces expressed an agonised mixture of proper pride and frost-bite.

Fitzgerald and myself found it difficult to ride in front of a lady, and gradually we dropped out of our places until level with Madame, in whose company we rode thereafter. She was shy at first, dropping her eyes whenever we looked at her, and hiding her face. But conversation being out of the question owing to our ignorance of the language and her inability to hear, we resorted to signs, and made considerable progress in her good graces. Finally, she became quite friendly, and ordered us here and there to take photographs, pinching our arms, tapping the camera, and then pointing to what she considered worthy of being taken. Madame rode like a man, and sat her spirited pony with the skill of a Cossack. I have never been one to rub elbows with Royalty, but hereafter I cannot deny having bumped knees with the mother of a Prince of the Church throughout the whole of one day.

In due time we reached the edge of the dense crowd that for some time had been visible waiting for us at the outskirts of the town. Behind, the maze of white buildings composing the Tashilumpo were spread upon the slope of a hill, and away to the right stood a massive

rock surmounted by the battlements of the jong, under whose shadow lay the town. It made a pretty picture, and the eyes of our friends were visibly gladdened. The advent of the procession was announced by a tremendous burst of music, cymbals clashing noisily, and gigantic horns breathing thunder. A tremor ran along the crowd, and then the people burst through the lines of soldiery that guarded the road, prostrating themselves before the Lama's chair, and fiercely striving to touch their heads upon the woodwork, or even the clothes of a bearer. Lictors, armed with heavy whips, lashed good-naturedly at the more forward, who were chiefly women, ready to risk their lives among the hoofs of the horses if only they might touch something holy. Surrounded by thousands of the devout, the procession was reduced to a crawl, the swashbucklers in front being unable to clear the way.

Strange that in this scene of holy enthusiasm the human voice was dumb. Not a shout could be heard, hardly a whisper. The air resounded with the barbarous but symphonious music, the harmless lashing of whips on heavy sheepskin clothing cracked sharply, and the heavy breathing and panting of a striving multitude made one low continuous murmur. Excited faces compassed us in every direction, those of the women red-eyed and streaked with tears. Masses of men stood spellbound, gazing raptly on the slow-moving equipage which held the being that to them was Divine. Merely to look upon the sacred personage was Communion, to touch was Salvation.

By-and-by a passage was made, and we moved on through a narrow lane flanked by ranks of monks holding aloft the laburums, oriflammes, gonfalons, and other flags of ecclesiastical significance. All the treasures of the monasteries were displayed, vessels of silver and gold, precious boxes, sacred pictures, all were held up that the holy glance falling upon them might render

them more holy. As we passed on the lane of people broke up, and an ever-increasing throng accompanied our progress, every now and again some enthusiast breaking through and rushing up to press forehead against even the hem of a garment of one of the Lama's company. The cymbals clashed incessantly, the deep-throated horns moaned continuously, but the people themselves were silent, only the sound of their thousands of trudging feet being heard. And so we entered Shigatse.

A short interval for rest and refreshment, and there began a "Blessing," the leading feature of ecclesiastical functions in Thibet. In a huge, dimly lighted apartment, divided by rows of massive wooden columns and draped with painted silk and ancient hangings, the Lama sat enthroned. The floor was dense with sombre-clad monks squatting on mats. On either hand of the Lama were seated the officials of State, some clothed in the dark marone of the monasteries, others in the brilliant colours allowed to lay employment. We four British were given a place of honour on the right in front of the row of principal abbots. In a corresponding position on the left were the Chinese Residents, one face full of character and intelligence, the other haggard, with lack-lustre eyes, evidence of disease or the fell opium habit. The Lama sat immovable in the dusk of this gloomy chamber, his pale face barely visible under the shadow of the canopy that overhung the throne. The silence was scarcely relieved by the coughing and shuffling of the waiting people. But at last there came a low rumbling voice chanting a prayer. From little more than a mutter it gradually rose and filled the air with resonant sound, then dropped to a whisper, then increased and increased in volume until one imagined in its tones all the deeps of a great cathedral organ. One long-sustained booming note—a rapid descent of the scale—and with a jerk the brief invocation ceased.

The Prime Minister now arose and approached the throne with bowed head and a scarf upheld in both hands. The Lama took the proffered scarf and let his hand dwell for a moment on the head of the Minister, who then backed clear and let his juniors come up one by one. When everybody official had been blessed, there followed in a long *queue* selected persons representing foreign communities, and visitors from distant parts. Of these we were first, and having been provided with silk scarves, we advanced and bowed to the Lama, whose face remained absolutely immobile, eyes looking far away with the unfathomable expression of an image of Buddha. Following us came the Chinese Residents, the Nepalese and Bhutanese Consuls, venerable, white-bearded merchants from Ladakh and Kashmir, and finally a detachment of long-haired and shaggily clad men from the wilds of Chungtang and the distant barbarous valleys of Kham. All the Buddhists put their heads forward to be touched, but Mahomedans and Hindus salaamed deeply. Thereafter the common people were let in to the number of a thousand, and they scurried quickly past the throne, brushing their heads against a thick silken tassel depending from a short stick which the Lama held in his hand. The blessing finished, the Lama retired, the assemblage standing up as he slowly left the chamber supported by officials on either hand.

In the afternoon a reception was held, secular in so far as it is possible to dissociate religious ceremony from the doings of an ecclesiastical community. As before, the Lama was seated on a throne, in a large hall richly ornamented and glowing with colour. The scene was much the same as in the morning, except that the centre of the hall was occupied by a number of small tables covered with platters of sweetmeats and dried fruits. In rear of the tables were great stacks of Thibetan bread—a crisp brown substance fried in butter, and very agreeable

in a cold climate. The bread piles were about six feet high and broad, and, perhaps, ten in length, representing a quantity quite beyond the eating capacity of the guests.

Proceedings began with what had all the appearance of a blessing, except that each person brought a present, which the Lama touched and of which an attendant took possession. The presents consisted of silver shoes worth about £10, vessels of various precious metals, rolls of silk, cloth, &c. When all the gifts had been handed over, the inevitable tea was brought. The Lama had a huge golden pot, studded with turquoises, all to himself. Attendants passed among the seated lamas and filled the wooden cups which the latter produced from the bosoms of their capacious robes. For us four there was a special teapot and Chinese bowls. But as for drinking, we knew better. We blew upon the surface to slide the rancid butter off the top, made a sucking noise with our mouths, and then handed back the cups, sufficiently nauseated, without drinking, by the smell of the tea alone. Next came the distribution of the fruit and sweetmeats, of which we received an ample share. Then came the *pièce de résistance*, the disposal of the enormous quantity of bread. The great doors of the hall were thrown open, and there poured in a horde of struggling humanity that rushed at the stacks of bread. With desperate fury these poor of the city fell on this provision of the gods, crammed the brittle stalks into sacks and bosom, punching their receptacles when full to make room for more. They fought like cannibals for the bread, and stole from each other when they could. And all the while the lictors of the road were among them, lashing with the whips, prodding with the heavy butts, and striking with their fists. One man had two sacks, and though beaten unmercifully, he continued until both were full, and then retired under a rain of blows.

In time the hall was cleared and the floor swept. Then came another round of tea, which gave place to a religious controversy between two monks. These hitched up their clothes, slapped their hands together, stamped their feet, looking for a verbal opening just as a pugilist looks for a chance to get in with his left. One represented Satan and the other some sacred personage, the discussion dealing with the birth of Buddha. Satan said Buddha was born with red trousers; after which sally he went into loud roars of laughter that drowned the indignant reply of his opponent. The saint then declared that Satan had a tail, whereat every monk in the room laughed delightedly. And so the two kept at it for about half an hour, frequently verging on blows, which never ensued. When Satan looked a winner all over, the controversy was declared closed, and the saint the victor—another injustice to the Devil, who is no more popular in Thibet than in Exeter Hall. More tea, and then dancing by a row of children beginning at 5 feet high and dwindling down to a little dot that could hardly balance itself. They were dressed like girls, but it detracted from the interest of the performance when we discovered they were all boys. Then more tea, and a weird sonata from the band. Finally the Lama rose, and with the slow and solemn step appropriate to holiness passed down and out of the hall, thus ending the ceremonies of the day.

A Thibetan Beggar.

A Chungtungi.

CHAPTER IV.

SHIGATSE TOWN.

Like all centres of trade, Shigatse is cosmopolitan. Here congregate merchants from Ladakh, Kashmir, and Gartok in the west; from Bhutan, Sikhim, Nepal, and India in the south; and from Lhasa, Kham, Chetang, and distant China in the east. From the north come no merchants, for there lies the desert Chungtang country, of which Bower, Wellby, the Littledales, and Bonvolat have written in terms of liveliest horror. Nevertheless this desert is not entirely uninhabited, for in summer it is covered with grass which in certain districts affords sustenance to large herds of sheep and cattle, besides numbers of the famous wild yak of Brobdingnagian proportions. The people who wander with their flocks in this desolate region are wild in appearance, and prone to murder and robbery when the opportunity offers. But having shorn their sheep, they must sell the wool. And so they gravitate at certain seasons into the valley of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), whereof Shigatse is the principal town.

Besides owning practically all the land in the immediate neighbourhood, the Tashilumpo possesses property in various distant parts, including the semi-inhabited regions bordering the Chungtang. The return of the Tashi Lama from his travels, and the necessity to pay tribute, has brought numbers of Chungtangis to Shigatse,

where their shaggy appearance and cut-throat demeanour give tone to the home-coming ceremonials and put life into the bazaar. Having realised upon their wool, the Chungtangis are flush of money, and they swagger round the open market-place with the assurance of cocks on their own middens. Lots of them are good-natured enough, and submit to the ordeal of the camera with much amusement. But some scowl viciously, and finger their knives with a realism worthy of any Corellian hero. It goes beyond fingering sometimes, as witness the ribs of a lama who, in keeping the ring during a performance, forgot to exercise discrimination in the use of his whip. The obedient Thibetans took their whacking peaceably and crushed back into the crowd, but one fierce figure stood his ground glaring, and got a second dose of the whip. After which the lama had to go to hospital.

The bazaar is held in an open space immediately under the towering rock which upholds the massive buildings of the jong. Merchants bring their wares about eight in the morning and conclude the day's business at twelve, after which you can buy nothing in Thibet, for throughout all the country there are no shops. Shigatse bazaar is unique because of the variety of people who attend it, and because the things that sell here are to be found in no other country. The butchers occupy a long line under a wall, upon which their wares hang. The profession is a simple one in Thibet, for meat cannot go wrong in the cold. The carcass of a sheep will keep for years, and, like wine, age increases its value. Next door are the tea merchants, mostly women, which seems natural. Here you may buy the real Chinese article in lumps, and ask in vain for the product of Assam or Darjeeling. Then there are cloth merchants, and coral merchants, and dealers in turquoises. Makers of stinking, untanned leather bags abound, as do purveyors of thick, woven boot-soles and the cloth leggings which the buyer

Shigatse Bazaar—a shy woman, and a truculent one,—note the evil eye.

must bind together at home. Pots and pans of quaint pattern are offered for sale, and the women flock round the stalls of those who stock coloured cloth and prints from India. But the silk and embroidery come from China, as do the tea sets and the bowls in which a Thibetan meal is served. Brass and copper ware is very expensive, and iron work is crude to a degree. A great business is that of herb-selling, many different varieties totally unknown to the pharmacopœia scenting the air. Vegetables are scarce in the winter-time, but dried fruits are plentiful, including peaches, apricots, raisins, and currants. Fish from the adjacent Tsangpo are purchaseable, and you may buy bundles of astrakhan for three annas a skin. Furs of many kinds are displayed, including lynx, fox, wolf, wild cat, bear, yak, and the thick handsome skin of the snow leopard. And if you are simple and trusting, they will sell you for Rs. 30 the pod of a musk-deer from which the precious ointment has already been extracted.

Shigatse reeks of human nature. The women spank their children, and cajole their husbands in the matter of finery. The men get drunk and sing unrepeatable songs, and even the lamas have their lapses. Fathers are anxious about the doings of their sons, and mothers teach their daughters to walk warily. Beggars infest the sunny side of walls and address wayfarers by high-sounding titles. Half-grown lamas smack their unfrocked brothers and sisters, and errand-boys loiter at the corners of the streets. A fiddler draws a crowd, and a family difference begets a local curiosity that could not be surpassed in the Old Kent Road. Lamas walk with the humility of the pious or with the gravity of the learned, while the muleteer curses his beasts in the raucous voice that appeals to the four-footed throughout the world. Girls trot hurriedly by if alone, talk confidentially when in pairs, and giggle irrepressibly when they are three or

more. Humanity here exists at a level of 13,000 feet above the sea, but between it and the humanity of lower levels there is apparent hardly the thirteen-thousandth part of a difference.

At Shigatse we see much of the Lama, for none of the receptions and entertainments consequent on his safe return are complete without the presence of the foreigners. Every day there is a blessing, followed by music and dancing by bands of villagers, who come to contribute their share to the general rejoicing. Every outlying monastery sends in a batch of monks, who solemnly parade before concourses of the faithful, beating their cymbals and roaring through gigantic horns. Even the female monks are represented, their heads shaven and their looks downcast. If appearances suggest correctly, it is the matrimonial disappointments who take the veil in Thibet. When we go to the gompa we are invariably treated with honour and kindness, and the slightest encouragement to any lama makes him beam with geniality and benevolence. There are here hundreds of lamas like Kim's, men who would not hurt a fly, and whose sole idea is the pursuit of righteousness. The tales of loose living which are so easy to level against the holy appear to have no foundation in fact, so far as Tashilumpo is concerned. The Lama himself has clean living clearly written on his face, and the traditions of the gompa and its many dependencies are all against indulgence. It is easy enough to conceal licentiousness, but it is impossible to hide the nature of the soil wherein it might flourish. Where 5000 celibates are herded together, many in the spring-time of life, there cannot be but some backsliding. But the simplicity of monastic life, its devotional rigours and midnight prayers, are all against frailty; and if impressions are worth anything as compared with positive knowledge, my belief is that no existing community could be more respectable and decent-living than that of Tashilumpo.

A Young Woman of Shigatse.

Chungtung Women.

Certain non-ecclesiastic officials invite us to their houses, where we eat Thibetan food and obtain a glimpse of domestic life. The fare is first-class eating, meat being cooked to perfection, and seasoned and salted to suit any reasonable taste. Only the tea we cannot stand—we have had so much of it now that we can barely summon up enough courage to give the conventional blow at the floating grease. The women peep about in the background and take a lively interest in us, though not daring to intrude themselves on our notice. But we are not so backward, and when the time for taking a photograph comes we insist on their appearance. Their timidity is highly becoming, especially in the younger ones, who need much encouragement. It is the greatest fallacy to suppose that Thibetan women are all ugly. The grease with which the lower-class women smear their faces to protect the skin from the biting wind is repulsive at first, but one soon learns to detect a pretty face underneath, and to forget the unsightly cosmetic in the presence of bright eyes and winning expression. Well-to-do women who need not go out of doors except in fine weather do not use the grease, besides which they wash regularly, or at least look as if they did, with the result that they present a highly pleasing appearance even to the fastidious European.

During our stay at Shigatse we paid a visit to the Nepalese Consul, a gentleman with the rank of lieutenant, who received us with great kindness. He produced cakes and Thibetan whisky of much potency, and a little son who went to school every day. Another day we visited the Chinese Resident, a person of much dignity and commander of a hundred scaramouches, whose band played us in and out with all the disregard of euphony which only Celestial music can attain. Here we were in quite another atmosphere, where knowledge of the world and advanced education exuded at every pore. The Chinaman is to Thibet as the Sahib is to Hindustan

—only more so. This exile among barbarians deprecated his surroundings, and regretted his inability to receive us fittingly. We discussed politics and art, religion and gastronomy, like true dilettanti, and bemoaned the tendencies of the times. But this Chinaman was a good human after all, as became evident when he warmed into telling us that his time was up in Thibet, and that he was off home to China in a day or two.

Then we gave a party. Two officials of the Lama's household and their sons were our guests, besides a duke, who owes his title to the fact of his being own brother to the Lama. No ladies were invited, not because we did not think of them, but because the poor things are not allowed into society. Our visitors handled their knives and forks with considerable skill, though perhaps it was due more to luck than to judgment that their tongues escaped. They were death on everything tasting of meat, but displayed no interest in a pudding. Scotch whisky gave them much joy, and *crême de menthe* sent them into ecstasies. After lunch we amused them with guns and rifles, and pictures and photographs. Then they went home—to fill up on Thibetan food, our servants told us. The Thibetan is a great trencherman, and when visiting India with the Lama it was customary for most of the retinue to astonish their hosts by their appetites, and then to go back to camp and gorge on national cookery.

The Tashilumpo itself is a regular town in extent, comprising streets and squares in apparently endless confusion. Its principal features are five temples erected to the memory of the five departed Tashi Lamas, or rather to the various reincarnations of the same individual. These are handsome and massive buildings of stone and wooden beams, with roofs ornamented in Chinese fashion. Inside are images of Buddha, supported by rows of vessels of ancient workmanship and faced by

Women at Shigatse Bazaar.

enormous copper bowls filled with butter, upon which float burning wicks. In each of the five temples, which are all much alike, inside and out, are huge teapots which, if the monks are to be believed, are made of pure gold. Otherwise the value of the things we saw can be but small, though possibly some of the metal work would be accounted curious in Europe. Probably the sacking to which Tashilumpo was subjected by the Nepalese in the latter part of the eighteenth century is responsible for the apparent absence of valuables.

After a week's stay at Shigatse Fitzgerald and myself decided to commence the long and trying journey that was to take us over unexplored country towards the Sikhim border. The Lama signified a wish to receive a farewell visit from us, and after the usual morning durbar we were received privately, and spent about an hour with his Holiness in his own quarters. We presented presents of considerable value, but these were not accepted as we were guests in the country, and should only receive presents, which were given to us in the shape of copper and silver worked teapots of handsome appearance and some value. The Lama showed us many of his treasures, and talked upon many subjects, leaving the impression on our minds of a very simple and kind-hearted young man. His faith in human nature is unshaken as yet, and his friendship for things and people British is undeniable. Our farewell was quite touching, the Lama begging us to remember that we should ever be welcome in his country, and hoping to see us again. I said that his next journey must be to London, where he would be sure of a welcome. But he rather mournfully said that he was afraid that was out of the question. And then we said goodbye to this truly amiable and gentle-minded young man, for whom perhaps the future holds great things, as things go in this part of the world.

CHAPTER V.

ACROSS UNTRODDEN GROUND.

SHIGATSE left behind, we enter the mountains to the south-west and commence our journey towards the Sikhim border. The first day's march took us along the valley traversed by the party of British officers who visited Gartok in the autumn of 1904. By this valley also had come from the opposite direction the Roman Catholic pioneers of 1708, who, entering Thibet from Nepal, travelled through Dingri to Shigatse and thence to Lhasa. Sarat Chandra Das had also approached Shigatse from this direction in 1879. Indeed this valley, being on the trade route from the west of Thibet, has frequently been traversed, and is well known. Here stands a monastery long famed for its printing-press. In winter the press does not work, probably because the ink cannot be kept from freezing, and we are disappointed in our hopes of witnessing the manner in which sacred literature is manufactured in Thibet. All around a big hall are ranged in shelves the printing-blocks, which are simply rectangular pieces of wood upon which a whole page of lettering has been carved. When in action a block is held in a vice and then levered by hand on to the paper, where it leaves a facsimile of the carving on its face. The process is simple and expeditious, and several bulky volumes can be printed off in a day. But the blocks, of which there

The famous Stag of Sikhim—a Captive at Shigatse

Sikhim Bear.

Skin-boat on the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) at Shigatse.

are very many thousands, represent long and patient labour, their workmanship and finish being very fine. Of the usual adjuncts of a printing-press there are none at Nartang Monastery, except that the unwashed condition of some of the monks, and all of the attendants, entitles them to rank with printers' devils.

We were fortunate at Nartang to find New Year festivities in full swing. In a large courtyard in front of the gompa about thirty monks were solemnly perambulating to the dirge of a band, and under the eyes of the assembled countryside. Their idea of dancing was limited to alternate lifting of the legs and solemn pirouetting, which lacked the interest of high kicking and the charm of skirt-dancing. But the grotesque dress and demoniac headgear of the performers was quite enough for the onlookers, who were entranced with the entertainment. Though entirely unexpected, the abbot received us with great courtesy, making room for us in the balcony overlooking the courtyard where he himself sat, and providing cakes and the inevitable tea, of which the butter becomes more rancid the farther away from Shigatse.

From Nartang we turned due south, leaving the trade route and entering country which had never before been trodden by Europeans. We had been warned by the Shigatse people that the route was wild and desolate, and that our way would be beset with difficulties. They could not understand that our anxiety to take this road was caused by the entire blankness of the map. Before leaving the Nartang Valley I had the luck to bring down three enormous cranes with a single barrel. These were sailing heavily along in a row, and their sudden collapse so astonished the gun-coolie that he regarded me thereafter as a magician. Bullets are understood in Thibet, but small-shot is quite uncomprehended.

So far we had travelled by a comparatively beaten track, but hereafter we struck due south, and entered a maze of mountains springing from a plateau about 15,000 feet above sea-level. Population was very sparse, though most of the valleys in which we travelled bore evidence of having been widely cultivated in times past. Ruined houses and villages were frequent, and we assumed they dated back at least one hundred years, perhaps two hundred. Throughout four days' march we shot continuously duck, partridge, crane, and hare. The latter could be found on any hillside, but the operation of walking them up on terribly broken ground was extremely laborious. One day we came to a small thicket about 100 yards long by 50 wide. We beat this promising-looking place for hare, but were disappointed to see not a sign of fur until at the very end of the cover, when there suddenly debouched about fifty grey shadows, which cantered slowly off in every direction. The Thibetan hare, so far as we have encountered him, is most delicious eating, and the prejudice against him in India as an article of diet is certainly not applicable here, where he cannot be anything but a clean feeder.

The strike of the hills among which we were travelling was generally south-west, and our usual day's journey consisted of a march along a valley and the negotiation of a pass which took us into a parallel valley. Our course, though zigzag, was southerly, and we were not compelled to make any serious deviation from our general direction. The valleys in which we travelled were cultivated as a rule in a very minor degree, and all water was frozen, one valley in particular showing a most picturesque series of white bands traversing the yellow ground. The passes we crossed were bleak, cold, and windy, and high enough to set heart and lungs pumping violently. Elevations varied between 15,000 and 17,000 feet. On the fourth day out we entered a broad and well-watered

Giri—" . . . *a desolate and wind-swept little village close to the border* . . ."
—see page 60.

An Encampment at 16,000 *feet*—see page 55.

" . . . *all water was frozen, one valley in particular showing a most picturesque series of white bands traversing the yellow ground*"—see page 50.

valley, through which ran a river that joins the Tsangpo a hundred miles west of Shigatse.

Here was situated Rhe Jong, a fort perched upon the point of a rock that towered perpendicularly out of the bed of the river, and attained a height of exactly 1000 feet. The Jongpen awaited us at a little hamlet nestling at the bottom, and we expressed a wish to visit his aerial home. He demurred, and explained that the road up was both tedious and dangerous, and that no European had ever seen even the outside of his jong. Asiatics never seem to grasp the fact that danger and novelty are just the thing that render a European's desires uncontrollable. Fitzgerald and myself would have taken that jong at the point of our hunting-knives rather than miss such an opportunity of breaking our necks and doing what no other white man had done before. The Jongpen had orders from Tashilumpo to provide us with every facility, and the hint that it might be necessary for us to complain of his disobligingness made him anxious to conciliate. And soon we were mounted and scrambling up the lower slopes of this road to heaven.

It surprised us rather to see the Jongpen mount a pony, but we assumed that the lower approaches were easy, and riding feasible. So we followed suit, to the annoyance of our nags, who had deemed their day's work at an end. We began by a nasty scramble up the face of a precipice, but as the drop was only twenty to eighty feet, we had no cause for complaint. Besides which no white man can ever decline to follow when an Asiatic leads—that is an axiom of life east of Suez, whether the road leads to glory or into the depths of Gehenna. Having scraped sideways up the front of the precipice, we came to a sharp ridge that stretched upward at about the same angle as the shrouds of a ship. Here our leader halted his pony to give it breath. I was

behind the Jongpen and Fitzgerald, my pony's forefeet planted upon a tiny plateau, his hind quarters and feet two steps down the precipice we had just ascended, while his tail waggled over the village far below. I remained in the saddle, for the excellent reason that there was no place to stand on if I had dismounted; besides which instinct told me that the slightest movement on my part would cause my panting steed to lose his balance, and result in our mutual precipitation into one of the gulfs which yawned on either side. At that moment I remembered the words of Richard Burton, to the effect that voyaging was victory; and I wondered if the great traveller had ever encountered situations that combined with victory the clammy sweat of mortal agony. Probably not, for Burton was a wise man, and did his travelling on the flat. It is a curious but indisputable fact that horses are incapable of giddiness, and that they scramble carelessly over places which ordinary human beings cannot contemplate without shuddering.

From the jong our view was restricted owing to a raging wind loaded with dust. Every now and then there would be a lull, and then we caught glimpses of distant mountain-tops, of deep valleys, and sometimes of snowy peaks. The jong itself was empty and cold, not even a garrison in occupation or a gun mounted on the battlements. Then we discovered why the Jongpen had been so reluctant to bring us up—the unfortunate man lived down below, and never went near his jong if he could possibly avoid it. And no blame to him. Along a knife-like ridge in rear of the jong a gompa clung precariously to the rocks, and here some twenty monks passed a dreary existence, buoyed up only by their proximity to the Nirvana which is their only earthly hope. To be so high up is no small advantage, for the wind is frequently so violent that a baggily clad monk has every chance of being caught up like Elijah and attaining

Rhe Jong, and Gompa—note the knife-like character of the ridge,—see page 51.

eternity without the trouble of dying. The gompa was a regular curio-shop of old ecclesiastical treasures, among which we noticed some very old-fashioned scale armour. Everything was dirty and rusty, and I imagine none of the things were of much value.

During our reconnaissance from the top of Rhe Jong we located a tall conical mountain which appeared to command an extensive view. As this peak would probably open up the hills that were surveyed by the Younghusband Mission from Khamba Jong in 1903, we decided to climb it and link up the topography of the country. We judged the height at 20,000 feet, and there was very little snow on the top to impede progress. After a day's marching we camped near the foot of our mountain, and Fitzgerald, observing burhel on the slopes, climbed 2000 feet and got a stout ram, the bullet passing through it and killing a little doe beyond. In the morning we started long before daybreak, with the temperature about 10 degrees below zero, and rode as far up the mountain as our horses could carry us. We dismounted at 17,000 feet and began the day's labour. Three thousand feet sounds a very moderate climb, and so it is at sea-level. But up here it is a very different matter, every step on the flat entailing an extra heart-beat, while actually to lift the body amounts to a severe strain. I defy any normal human being to take more than ten steps on a steep hillside at an elevation of 18,000 feet without resting, not so much for breath, but to ease the panting of the heart, which feels as if it must rend the chest. Besides which one is enveloped in sheepskin clothes that impede movement and greatly add to weight. It took me five mortal hours to surmount 3000 feet. Fitzgerald reached the top in four hours, when I had still 500 feet to go. But you cannot expect the same performance from a scribbler as you do from the aide-de-camp to a full General. All our aneroids were paralysed

when we got to the top, but the hypsometer, in which the boiling of the water was a task for Sisyphus, indicated just under the 20,000. The temperature, despite a bright sun high in the heavens, was 22° F. During the descent we almost ran into a string of burhel, numbering about fifty rams and females. We were on the top of a cliff under which they were walking quietly along in Indian file. They were almost immediately below us, not more than eighty yards distant. Of course the idiots with our rifles were behind, and the herd was off before they came up.

Having descended our mountain, which we named Campbell-Bannerman on account of its commanding position, we remounted our horses and proceeded to negotiate a pass which the Thibetans had described as particularly easy. So far as grade is concerned it certainly was easy, but we were not prepared to reach 18,000 feet after ten miles of slow ascent. On the other side there was practically no fall, the reverse consisting of a great plateau of rolling downs varying between 17,000 and 19,000 feet. Despite the great height, this was covered with coarse grass, upon which thousands of gazelle were feeding and strolling about. We thought that in so desolate and uninhabited a region these graceful creatures would have been tame enough to allow of our getting within range. But, on the contrary, they were extremely timid, and scampered off when we got within 800 yards.

The country we were now in was probably as high as any in Thibet, swept by terrific winds for six or eight hours every day, and entirely without houses or inhabitants. Throughout four days we never met a single wayfarer, and a more bleak or more lonely region it would be hard to imagine. Each night we were fortunate in striking shepherds living in tents, who in the evening, when their flocks were gathered together, supplied us

with milk and fuel. Their encampments were surrounded by stone dykes, built to protect the sheep from marauding wolves. Without the partial cover of these walls our tents must have been torn from the ground, so violent was the wind.

This desert crossed, we reached the village of Dotha, within a mile of which members of the Younghusband Mission reached in 1903. They would have come farther doubtless, but the pass leading to the village was blocked by a great wall, through which a regiment of Thibetans declined to let them pass. Dotha will remain in our memories by reason of the sand-grouse, which we slaughtered in great numbers. Those beautiful little birds, in coveys of ten to forty, covered the ground around the village during the morning we were there. We began by walking them up, and firing as they rose. Four barrels of sixes often resulted in only one or two birds, for their feathers are very thick, and the shot fails to penetrate. But when disturbed and flighting, they give grand sport. And for the pot they could not be surpassed.

From Dotha we march down an immense open plain covered with grass and intersected by numerous frozen streams, whereof the water bubbles noisily under the ice. Here are large flocks of sheep and yak, looking fat as butter and perfectly contented with their lot. From this plain we cross a low range of hills, and find ourselves facing the Sikhim boundary and the tremendous barrier of ice and snow of which Kinchinjunga is the principal point. In the extreme east lies Powhunri, a mass of serrated peaks and tumbling glaciers. Next him stands square-topped Kinchinjow, and then the elegant head of Chumiomo rears itself in the air. Beyond these Pandim, Kubra, Kinchinjunga, and many others are inextricably mixed; while away to the south-west are the perpetual snows of the Nepalese mountains,

Everest, the highest in the world, floating ghostlike in the horizon, distant over a hundred miles. To the immediate west shimmers the large and unexplored Lake Telthung.

During the day we passed sulphur springs, whence the water rises so hot that one's finger retires from contact like a bullet from a gun. A small pond kept at a reasonable temperature is used for bathing, for which purpose a family arrived during our inspection. We got our cameras ready, intending to establish indisputable evidence that Thibetans are capable of washing. But the women of the party held back, not from reasons of modesty, we understood, but because they were afraid we would steal their clothes when they were in the water. After nearly three months of Thibet we were certainly a disreputable-looking pair, and our beards, of which females in Thibet have a horror, as their husbands cannot grow them, were quite enough to arouse suspicion. We also had entertained the idea of bathing, until the advent of the party, when we changed our minds—but not because we were afraid of having our clothes stolen. Here we shot a brace of Brahminy ducks, which, during the cooking, smelt so strongly of brimstone that we gave them to the servants, who gave them to the dogs, who wouldn't look at them. Brahminys in other parts of Thibet make splendid soup, but I suppose even a duck cannot touch pitch without being defiled. The presence of these tawny Brahminys looked peculiarly appropriate to the sulphurous deposit that covered the ground, and we wondered if the birds derived their colour in any degree from the character of what was evidently a favourite spot.

Our camp that evening was very cold, and the temperature dropped to 9 degrees below zero in the early morning. Despite a bright sun in the forenoon, we could not avoid a feeling of chilliness, doubtless due

Devil-dancers at Nartang—see page 49.

A Young Lady weaving, and her amused Papa—see page 57.

to the endless vista of snowy mountains on the southern horizon. But a young lady engaged in weaving cloth, in an open compound adjoining our camp, had no such ideas, for she stripped to the waist while working. Our next march was terribly long, about twenty-five miles we judged, and landed us at a nunnery, which perhaps accounted for such a display of stamina. *En route* we passed Khamba Jong, under the walls of which I shot the only snipe we had seen in Thibet. Arrived at Trasung Anigompa, we were disappointed to find that neither the abbess nor any of her nuns were waiting us, though they sent many servitors of the other sex to attend to our wants. Our camp was fifteen miles due east of Khamba Jong, our object in diverting from the straight road south being to map the country eastward, towards the Kala or Bham Lakes, which had never been explored.

Basing ourselves at the anigompa (*ani* before *gompa* makes a monastery into a nunnery), Fitzgerald surveyed and sketched for two days, while I wrote up my notes. After two days of work we decided to take a holiday with our rifles. Starting about two in the morning we rode for several hours, each in a different direction, and at daylight I found myself with the shikari at the mouth of a gorge in a mass of mountains. Leaving our horses, we advanced into the heart of this wild place, and after climbing about 1000 feet perceived four burhel quietly feeding on a slope in front. We stalked them for half an hour, but the ground gave no opportunity for getting within range. The only way to get a shot was to climb round the top of the mountain we were on, and hope to get at them from the other side. All four were rams with good heads, so I made up my mind for what must be an hour's grind and a climb of 1500 feet.

After a weary ascent we had nearly gained the top

of the mountain on the side farther from the burhel, when the shikari suddenly stiffened like a pointer and fell on his face. And no wonder, for a cautious peep ahead showed a herd of animals peaceably feeding. We dropped back clear of the skyline and worked round to a heap of rocks, behind which it was possible to prepare for action. Here I found a hole through which I could see with binoculars, and bringing them to bear I became suddenly faint as I realised that I was gazing, not at burhel, but at *Ovis ammon*. There were seven rams and three females, all cropping the grass, bar one—a monster old ram with shaggy grey hair round his neck, and horns that swept the ground, and so big at the base that they made his face look out of all proportion. There was a general appearance of greyness about the brute that made him look aged, and probably it was on account of his years and those heavy horns that he was resting instead of eating like the others. Shooting on virgin soil one never knows what may be encountered, and on such a spot nothing was more possible than a record head. I'm afraid there was fear and trembling in the hands that poked the .303 into the cleft in the rocks, and a dimness in the eyes that endeavoured to draw a bead on that hoary old patriarch of the mountains. For no sooner had the report of the rifle commenced reverberating among the hilltops than he was off like a racehorse, horns and all, and I never set eyes on him or any of his herd again. At 200 yards I ought to have got him, but the eccentricity of gravity, and the rarity of the air consequent on an elevation of 18,000 feet, modify the trajectory of a bullet so considerably that one needs perfect calmness to make proper allowances. Calm I was not, and so that ram roams in Thibet to this day.

Of course the burhel were gone, and though I tramped the mountains until dusk we saw never another hoof.

The only living creature we encountered was a huge lammergeier perched on a rock. The creature was laughing at me in his beard, and I would have shot him if he hadn't been sitting within twenty feet of me, and helpless after a gorge on a dead yak. At our standing camp I found Fitzgerald, who had ridden ten miles to give me news of a herd of *ammon* that he had found. He had shot two and found that they continued to feed in the neighbourhood; and knowing that I was very keen, he had given up his chance of bagging more, that I might have an equal opportunity —which shows that the sportsman is not yet extinct, despite the degeneracy of the times. Next day I hunted high and low for the *ammon*, and did come on them— only to score another miss. Evidently I am down for a peerage, or matrimony, or some other form of Fortune, for I have no luck with hornéd beasts.

CHAPTER VI.

RECROSSING THE FRONTIER.

Our time in Thibet was now up, and we prepared to return to India. From Trasang Anigompa we marched to Giri, a desolate and wind-swept little village close to the border, and the last inhabited place in Thibetan territory on the road to Sikhim. Here we had arranged for thirty coolies to take our baggage across the passes, which we had been warned were impassable to ponies or mules. But a panic spread among the men who had been engaged, and they all bolted during the night. We were now stranded in a desert country which there seemed no way of leaving. At this juncture the lieutenant in command of the Chinese post came to our rescue, and his rapscallions beat the village, producing six ponies and eight coolies. Sacrificing our riding ponies to transport necessities, we then made a start, hoping that the Thibetan predictions regarding the difficulty of the frontier passes would be falsified.

For several hours we toiled up a gentle slope that led to the wall of ice and snow constituting the Sikhim frontier. From a distance it seemed impossible that there could be a gap, so compact and precipitous was the appearance of this marvellous and stupendous barricade. But as we crawled upward the mass before us gradually changed front, and we realised that what appeared to be one straight line of mountain was in

reality a tumbled maze through which it was possible to wind. Chumiomo, 22,400 feet, stood out in front, and by working round to its rear we found ourselves on the flank of Kinchinjow, 23,000 feet, though at one time it seemed impossible to pass between these two without surmounting some towering spur clothed in perpetual ice and snow. Our highest point was the Kangra La, 16,900 feet, and here we found the gorge between the mountains wide and open, and just sprinkled with snow. Eternal ice glittered high up on either side of the way, and in front was a vista of dazzling white tops that lost themselves in the cobalt of heaven.

In Thibet snow seldom lies below 19,000 feet, and very little above that; a white top is a rare sight among the innumerable peaks that serrate the horizon of a Thibetan landscape. So curious a circumstance is accounted for by the paucity of the rainfall, which in some parts of the valley of the Tsangpo is said to average about eight inches per annum, while in other regions it is certainly much less. The humidity of the atmosphere is exceedingly low throughout the year. Were these conditions reversed, and Thibet subject to greater humidity and a heavier rainfall, it is unquestionable that the country would be completely Arctic in character, and that the accumulated snow, in the shape of glaciers, would overflow the low-lying ground and form an eternal sheet of ice. But the Himalayas block the passage of the southern monsoons and force the moisture-laden clouds from equatorial regions to disgorge their burthen. Hence we have an extraordinary provision of nature, withholding from the Thibetan plateau the moisture that would render it uninhabitable, and catching on the Himalayan slopes the waters that irrigate India, which otherwise would be an arid and humanly impossible desert.

An incomplete understanding of this phenomenon

nearly landed our small party in disaster, for we had never quite realised that, though the country in which we had been travelling was free from snow at great heights, we should encounter on the other side of the Himalayan range a totally different condition. On the northern side of the frontier the snow-line is practically 20,000 feet, even in winter, but on the southern slopes of the watershed accumulated ice and snow, consequent on continual saturation, extend down to 8000 feet, at which point the heat of the Indian sun defeats further advance. So from the moment we crossed the main ridge of the Himalayas we found snow in increasing quantity. At first it lay in drifts which could be circumnavigated or crossed. But having descended about 1000 feet we found the drifts so deep and continuous that the labour of ploughing through greatly increased, and our horses became worn out. After so hard a day's journey it was necessary to halt and rest men and beasts.

We camped for the afternoon and evening, intending to start again at night, when we hoped that the ponies would be able to proceed upon the crust of frozen snow that usually forms after sundown. Seldom perhaps has it been vouchsafed to mere man to travel amid such magic surroundings. Those who have visited Darjeeling and witnessed the unrivalled barrier of mountain and glacier which forms the northern boundary of Sikhim will understand our situation. Within a distance of sixty miles are ranged a series of snow-clad mountains in which no fewer than twelve peaks measure over 22,000 feet. King among them is Kinchinjunga, 28,150 feet, supported by others varying between 26,000 feet and 23,000 feet above sea-level. Our intention was to go slap through the middle of this wilderness of mountain, glacier, and eternal snow. It was strange to think that we were to plunge into the very midst

of these Snowy Mountains upon which, three months before, I had gazed with such awe and wonder. From the Thibetan side they do not overshadow the horizon as they do from Sikhim, but the memory of the mighty view from the south filled me with an overwhelming curiosity to explore, and with a feeling of dread that could not be suppressed.

About ten o'clock we struck camp and moved off in brilliant moonlight that, reflected by the snow, made the surroundings as bright almost as day. Perspective was curiously affected by the shimmering snow, and we seemed to be moving at the bottom of a deep white cup that offered no outlet. All around towered tremendous heights, their slopes scarred with black shadow cast by overhanging rocks. Here and there glaciers flashed back the light of the moon, and in the far distance a lofty icefield sparkled and shone like a sheet of polished silver. Beside us a subglacial stream roared and hissed in the chasms and caverns of the glacier that carried it. Otherwise dead silence reigned, for avalanches are held fast in the grip of the evening frost. The night was delicious, for no glare came from the snow and no wind penetrated to the bones. Warmly clad, we were unconscious of cold, indeed conscious only of the fairyland in which we moved.

But, alas, our horses and coolies fared differently. They, poor creatures, were floundering along in grievous fashion, falling and losing their loads, sinking up to their chests in soft snow, and breaking their hearts in the endeavour to regain a firm footing. After five hours of infinite toil we called a halt, for further progress seemed impossible. At three o'clock Fitzgerald decided to go forward with a couple of coolies and reconnoitre. I camped with the remainder of our train, waiting to hear what the road was like ahead. After a long rest men and horses regained strength, and at ten in the

morning we started again, no word having reached us from Fitzgerald. After two hours of struggling with adversity, in which time we had only advanced about half a mile, a note came from Fitzgerald to say that the snow in front was infinitely worse, and impassable to horses. He said it was best to send all the baggage back to Giri, with instructions to the native officer in charge to return to India by the Chumbi Valley. He suggested my coming on and catching him at Tangu. In a few minutes I had given the Jemadar his orders, had packed up my bedding, and made a start. In the full belief that there lay before me no more than a few miles of hard going I took a very small quantity of food, for Fitzgerald had warned me not to overload the coolies, of which I took only two, as the remainder were necessary for the return of our transport to Giri.

Already fatigued by the exertions of the night before, and the endeavour in the morning to find a passage for the transport animals, I began my tramp to Tangu in that philosophic frame of mind which perceives a goal only, and ignores intervening difficulties. I hoped to get through to the northernmost village in Sikhim by evening, and there to rest for a week. But the sun went down and found us still toiling through the snow, now floundering up to the waist, at other times tumbling head over heels down a slope. At nine o'clock one of the coolies pointed to the end of the valley in which we were travelling, and uttered the word *Tangu*. The valley was brilliantly white in the moonlight, but at the extremity was a dark patch of forest. In this I saw a flicker of light, which, when examined through the glasses, showed as dancing fire-light from the door of a wooden cottage. So satisfied was I of the reality of this vision that I quite recovered strength and, followed by the coolies, made a vigorous effort to cover the remaining mile of journey. But in

the patch of forest there was no cottage, nor any sign of light or of human habitation. The picture seen through the glasses, which to this day I could draw with full details, was a pure hallucination, product of disordered nerves and exhausted vitality. One comfort there was—the footsteps of Fitzgerald and his coolies were quite distinct in the snow, and soon afterwards I came to the place where he had written the note and sent one man back, the little episode being easily understood from the marks. Fortunately, owing to the bright moonlight, there was no possibility of missing the way.

At eleven o'clock I reached the Tangu bungalow, to find it perched on a small hill a hundred feet up from the level of the valley. It took me exactly an hour to make this little climb, and when I stumbled in upon Fitzgerald I could barely stand. Nor could I speak until a hot cup of tea put some life into my wearied body.

Tangu, I had imagined, would signal the end of our hardships and the return to normal conditions. But Fitzgerald's greeting included very different information. There were still twenty miles to be covered before we were out of snow and safe in the village of Lachen, the most northerly populated place in Sikhim during the winter. Tangu was certainly full of houses, but they were all empty, the owners having retired south, all but one old couple who looked after the rest-house. They had no food to spare, and if we and our coolies were not to starve we must resume the march at once. A night's rest was imperative, but in the morning we set out, not very briskly, but with the determination engendered by a vanishing larder.

From Tangu we had a horrible journey, the way proving harder even than we had been led to anticipate. We were continually sinking waist-deep into the snow, and slipping upon treacherous ground. Our coolies, who

had less food than we had, stuck to their task most manfully, though greatly exhausted and suffering from snow-blindness. We usually travelled all night, halting now and again in the day when the heat of the sun and the glare on the snow became almost unbearable. Half-way to Lachen the mountains close in, and form narrow ravines of great beauty and picturesqueness. But the steepness of their sides results in continuous avalanches and landslips in these early days of spring thaw. The road, of course, was covered with snow, but we were able to follow it except where it had been completely swept away into the gorge below. At such places we had to run considerable risk crossing snow or rock slides, which, beginning thousands of feet above, ended in a racing torrent hundreds of feet below. Cutting steps was simple enough, but it was quite another thing whether or not our weight, on a steep descent where everything was in a state of poise, might not set the whole hillside in motion. To senses dulled by fatigue, however, one place was very like another, and we ploughed our way along without much thought of the consequences.

Eventually we got through, completely exhausted, after sixty-three hours' toil, alternated with short spells of sleep. The impulse to lie down by the way was often almost irresistible, but we kept each other going. The coolies were very badly off for food, and Fitzgerald and myself did not fare much better. Our boots suffered worst, and Fitzgerald was practically barefooted when we arrived at Lachen. Several times we came across the tracks of bear and leopard, and in such starving weather it was necessary to look out for denizens of the forest. When at last we were nearing Lachen we were greatly tickled to encounter two men armed with bows and arrows, who said they had come every day for a week to meet us, having been instructed from Gantok that two Sahibs were expected through the pass. At first we

thought the bows and arrows were to be used for our destruction, but it appeared they were meant for defence against wild beasts. At Lachen our adventures ended, for thereafter we were out of snow, marching down the lovely valley of the Teesta, with only the white ridge of Himalaya in the rear to remind us of past toil. After all, Burton must have known both sides of the question, else he could never have understood enough to write that voyaging is victory.

There is no doubt we had cause to congratulate ourselves that we were well out of a bad fix; but our feelings were mixed, for though we had escaped, we were in complete ignorance of the fate of our caravan. After leaving Tangu a storm occurred in the mountains behind, and we greatly feared that the Jemadar and his following had been caught in it. Our relief was great when, a fortnight later, we heard that the party under the Jemadar had reached the Chumbi Valley in safety, after undergoing many vicissitudes. Jemadar Shahzad Mir, our native surveyor, had been the cheeriest and most helpful of comrades throughout our travels, never sick or sorry, and always game for anything. He has seen a lot of the world, and some idea of the extent of his wanderings will be gathered from the following record: In 1886-87 he served with the Afghan Boundary Commission, in 1889 he travelled with Younghusband in the Pamirs, and in 1895 accompanied the Pamir Commission. In 1898 he went on secret service into the dangerous country inhabited by the frontier tribes. In 1898 he crossed Thibet to Peking with Wellby, and again in 1899 accompanied that distinguished traveller to the Soudan, the sources of the Nile, and Lake Rudolph, ending up in London, where he received much attention. In 1902 he was in Abyssinia, and in 1903 served with the Abyssinian Boundary Commission. Besides these adventures, he has contrived to serve with his regiment, the 11th P. W. O.

with another section of our frontier, I do not propose to do more than premise that vulnerability does exist, and that defence of the north-western frontier is an essential consideration of Indian government.

Carrying further the parallel of a camp, it might be said that the Russian intrigues in Thibet, which were responsible for our recently awakened interest in that country, constituted something in the nature of a night attack from an unexpected direction. Believing our Indian camp secure from aggression on the Himalayan side, we had neglected not only the posting of picquets, but we had failed to maintain our prestige by the enforcement of treaty conditions. And the consequence was an expedition, trifling in dimensions no doubt, but one that violated an immutable principle of military defence by diverting strength from the real defensive line to a point that ordinary precautions should have made secure. In 1885 we had an opportunity of establishing ourselves in Lhasa, but other interests caused us to forgo the opening. Had we not sacrificed the right of entry to Lhasa for concessions in Burmah, there probably would have been free intercourse with Thibet since 1886, and the situation which gave rise to the expedition of 1904 could never have developed.

That part of Thibet which counts in the frontier problem does not actually adjoin British territory, being separated therefrom by the native states of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikhim, each of which in varying degrees is subject to our influence. The absence of proximity, however, detracts but little from the importance of Thibet's political attitude towards India. As students of Eastern affairs know, Lhasa is the nerve-centre of the religious life of a great part of Central Asia. The Buddhism professed in the Himalayan states mentioned above was known to be a somewhat degraded perversion of the original tenets of this once in India, and

in other parts of the world still, great faith. During the visit of the expedition to Lhasa it was found, as was long suspected, that the Buddhism of Thibet itself was no purer or higher than that practised in adjoining countries. From this it has been deduced that the influence of Thibet over its neighbours is less than was imagined, which, if admitted, would materially diminish the importance of Thibet as a factor in the frontier problem.

But there are in the history of mankind innumerable proofs that illogicalness and a low ethical standard are no bar to the spread of a faith and the maintenance of its influence. What is essential is that a belief should suit the temperament of a people, and that its practice should be compatible with their environment. The Buddhism of the Himalayas to-day is merely the Buddhism of India a thousand years ago, pruned and subverted to fulfil the religious requirements of people lower in the intellectual scale than were its originators. Because the lamaic version is puerile and preposterous, and because its upholders have been worsted in the, to them, foreign and abhorrent game of war, are no reasons for assuming that Thibet is a lesser influence than was supposed.

Indeed there are grounds for believing that Thibetan example and precept are as important to Himalayan Buddhism as they ever were. Evidence of this is to be found in the extreme veneration accorded by Buddhists to the Tashi Lama when he passed through Sikhim, and during his stay in India. Thibet has ever been a name to conjure with from one end of the Himalayas to the other, as the holy terror of hill coolies of all denominations showed when they were employed with the expedition to enter the sacred territory. Nor is there a particle of evidence to prove that the fame of Thibet has diminished because Lhasa has been violated.

Granting the moral ascendancy of Thibet in Central

her, would we feel happy in the knowledge that her co-religionist and vassal across our border was independent of our influence and free from our surveillance? Buddhism is a power in Asia to-day, and is like to be a greater power to-morrow. Thibetan Buddhism, including that of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikhim, is not quite the same as that professed in the Far East. But the principles are the same, and the practice approximates sufficiently to form a bond of sympathy that circumstances might easily strengthen. A *jehad* is among the favourite institutions of Asia, and the Chinese have shown themselves as susceptible of its charm as the nations of the Middle East. And while it is recognised that religious faith as a motive of human action is no longer the power it was, it remains that a common belief is a firm basis on which to coalesce for the attainment of a common object. If ever a Buddhist combination should be formed in Asia, its influence would be bound to be felt in the Himalayas, and, if aggressive, its efforts would certainly be directed towards the alienation of the states on our Indian border.

The possibility of the establishment of Russian influence at Lhasa must also be considered. That relations of some kind exist at present between the deposed Dalai Lama and Russian agents is indisputable. An outcome of the present situation in Thibet may be the return of this dangerous personage to Lhasa, and the resumption of power by one who in the past coquetted with Russia, and who, until quite recently, was known to have obtained sanctuary in territory under Russian influence. It is imperative that the political horizon of the three states actually on our border should be limited to British surroundings. In that horizon there would be a break were it known that Russian counsels possessed weight in Lhasa.

To guard against possible contingencies requires only

the maintenance of British influence and prestige in the religious capital of Central Asia. With Nepal friendly, positive military aggression is out of the question, and must remain so while nature's barricades exist and armies are unable to fly. Thibet is absolutely impassable to a Russian army, though a squadron of Cossacks might easily get to Lhasa. In this part of the world we need take no defensive measures. All that is necessary is that a flank, splendidly endowed by nature, should be picqueted. Aware that surprise is impossible, no enemy can then arise where his efforts would be wasted.

Yet we are pledged to abstain from establishing a representative in Lhasa, or even in Thibet. Certainly the Trade Agent posted by treaty at Gyantse may keep eyes and ears open. But the nature of his appointment detracts from his position and influence in the country, and he lives off the main trade route, and at a place of only secondary consequence. In securing the friendship of the Tashi Lama we have made some effort to atone for the mistake of allowing Lhasa completely to get rid of us. But Shigatse and Lhasa have always been more or less at daggers drawn, and the influence of the Tashi Lama is confined to his own country. Only in the event of his assumption of the rulership will his friendship become of first importance to us.

It is well understood that if the Indian Government had had a free hand in determining the course of the negotiations at Lhasa in the autumn of 1904, the situation to-day would be more satisfactory. But the home Government were already committed to a policy which entailed sacrifice of what was most desirable from the Indian point of view. That a local government should frequently be disappointed in the decisions of a supreme government, guided by the wider considerations of imperial policy, is in the nature of things, and reflects no blame on either side. But it is very possible that

the supreme government may not have assigned to any particular problem of local government a sufficiently important place in the scale of questions which must continually confront them from all parts of the world.

It would appear that the home estimate of the Thibetan question might be so characterised. Now that we have fuller information with regard to Thibet, it may be that the Imperial Government realises that a mistake has been made, and that it would have been well if Indian wishes in regard to the establishment of a resident at Lhasa had been more carefully considered before Lord Lansdowne gave assurances to Russia. But the molecules of international politics are in perpetual motion, and opportunities continually occur for bargaining in concessions and for the cancelling of pledges.

We want no more expeditions over the Himalayan passes; we covet no portion of Thibetan territory; nor have we the slightest desire to interfere with the internal affairs of the country. But we do want to make sure that nobody else shall gain any ascendancy which might be reflected among the Himalayan states. To guard effectually against this we only need a sentry at Lhasa; and it may save us much expense and anxiety in the future if we avail ourselves of the first opportunity which offers to free ourselves from the obligation of doing without one.

Discussion of the commercial possibilities of Thibet must necessarily be preceded by a brief investigation of the conditions under which the people live, and a statement of the circumstances governing trade in the past.

The experiences of the Younghusband Expedition, as well as the many books which have dealt with Thibet in recent years, will have amply demonstrated the nature of the climate, and the fact that agriculture, beyond the provision of necessities for the inhabitants, is practically incapable of development. But nature

having provided immense expanses of country covered with rich and succulent, though scanty, grass, there is in this circumstance reason for believing that great expansion is possible in the production of commodities suitable for export. And a glance at the map shows that the most profitable outlet for an export trade is across the passes into Bengal.

Of the causes which hitherto have restricted the exportation of Thibetan productions there are two of leading importance. One is the fact that, despite treaties to the contrary, both Chinese and Thibetans have done everything possible to handicap trade with India, particularly at that point where the products of the rich Tsangpo Valley find a natural outlet to the plains of Bengal. The other is due to the social system of the country, which not only absorbs into the monasteries a great proportion of the male population, but inflicts on the remainder the burden of supporting swarms of monks whose economic value to the country is absolutely nil. Thus, with a large idle population consuming a great part of the produce, and the existence of an artificial check on the export of the surplus, it has been inevitable that foreign trade should languish and lack that elasticity which is characteristic of commerce in other countries in Asia.

It is curious to observe how trade difficulties have reacted upon the social system of Thibet and actually served to perpetuate it. It is a truism of human existence that one of man's chief instincts is the accumulation of wealth in some form or another. If the opportunity to attain riches is denied him, only then will his ambition be turned in other directions. In the valleys of the Tsangpo and its numerous tributaries are centred the agricultural resources of the country. These valleys are capable of producing a food-supply considerably in excess of the wants of the agriculturists, but owing to the weight of cereals and the expense of transport their exportation

is out of the question. In these circumstances the natural consequence would be the arising of a population devoted to trade and industry, obtaining bread from their agricultural brethren in exchange for the results of their work, and exporting to foreign countries the necessarily substantial surplus. But the check on export trade has deprived the people of the opportunity to make industry profitable, with the result that gravitation to the idle life of the monasteries has been made easy. And with the gradual increase in the numbers and influence of those devoting themselves to the professional practice of religion there has arisen a state of affairs in which it has become indispensable for the agriculturist to identify himself with the monastic system, or suffer from its cupidity.

Travelling in Thibet, one marvels to perceive so many houses in ruins, and so many valleys, once under cultivation, now totally uninhabited. Two or three hundred years ago the population of Thibet must have been far greater than it is to-day, and we know that the monastic system then was in its infancy. It is easy to understand that in those days the productive powers of the land and people were greatly in excess of requirements, thereby directly encouraging the institution of establishments conducted by idlers. Had industry, with the object of foreign export, been possible at that time, we should have seen the development of trade, and the arising of a class of wealthy merchants instead of the growth of property-owning monasteries which has taken place. But some hundreds of years ago commerce with outlying countries, unconnected by water, was practically unknown. And by the time industrialism in Europe had forced the opening of distant and difficult markets, the lamaic system had obtained on Thibet an octopus-like grip that stifled all enterprise. Finally, we have the modern demand for outlet to commerce, which has so grievously upset Chinese social arrangements, impelling China to urge

upon her vassal the necessity for closing her doors to European inroad. This action of China, together with the apparent poverty of the country, has resulted in the isolation which has surrounded Thibet with so much mystery, and has practically cut her off from enjoying a share of the trade of India.

This interpretation of the origin and present condition of affairs in Thibet being conceded, it becomes obvious that for an expansion of trade quite disproportionate to past results but two things are needed, namely—internal resources; and unrestricted opportunities to trade, coupled with the natural concomitant of improved communications.

Three months' travel in Thibet has convinced me that there are in that country millions of acres under grass supporting at present not a tithe of the sheep and cattle which might thrive thereon. Observation to this effect has been made, be it noted, in the dead of winter, during the months of January, February, and March, when the temperature at night seldom or never registers higher than zero, and when it might be supposed that vegetation was barely able to retain life. In winter grass on the Thibetan plains is far from abundant, but what there is is extraordinarily nourishing, as witnessed by the fine condition of the yak and the juicy eating of the game one shoots. In summer these plains must be a positive paradise for cattle, a conclusion supported by the evidence of several recent travellers. Nor must it be forgotten that certain parts of Thibet are covered with herds of wild animals, which certainly do not inhabit places that fail to afford an easy living. The Tuna plain, on the trade route between India and Thibet, and one of the bleakest regions in the country, supports, in addition to many thousands of yak and sheep, immense numbers of wild ass and gazelle, besides quantities of small game. In other parts of Thibet, no less fertile than the Tuna

plain, there exists a similar amount of game. But because there is no trade route there are very few yak and sheep, though thousands might find nourishment.

The potentialities clearly are an immense increase in the supply of wool, and the establishment of a large trade in hides. Under present conditions the manual attendance indispensable to the management of herds of cattle and flocks of sheep is unprocurable owing to so large a proportion of the adult male population living idly in the monasteries, and because the remainder of the people are kept busy feeding themselves and the sloths. But here we come to the other essential to a development in trade, and to the consideration of the effect it must have on the people and their occupations.

The recent treaty with Thibet provides for the removal of all restrictions on trade between India and Thibet. Nor is it likely that in the future we will allow China or Thibet to disregard their obligations in the farcical manner of the past. When it has been realised in Thibet that every pound of wool has a substantial value on the frontier of India, there will be an immediate increase in the supply. And when it is further understood that there is no bar to export, and that the demand is continuous, there will immediately arise among Thibetans the inclination to make their sons into traders and cattle-breeders instead of monks. To-day every farmer in Thibet, like every ploughman in Scotland, must make one son a priest. But the humble Scot aims at the betterment of his family, while the Thibetan merely gives a hostage to a system which otherwise would grind him down to the uttermost farthing.

Nothing can be clearer than the consequences of a serious expansion of trade in Thibet. It means a blow to Lamaism, which will result not perhaps in its extinction, but in its relegation to a place in the social scheme more in consonance with economic requirements.

Harmless and innocent as the monastic system is on the whole, it is yet a dreadful incubus from the point of view of industrial Europe. Not only does it literally devour the land, but by the entailment of celibacy it prevents an exceedingly large proportion of the male inhabitants from propagating the race. The Thibetans are a virile and manly people, else they would not inhabit so rigorous a country. Natural law, in the shape of British demands for trade facilities, is stepping in again, and one cannot but foresee in the future a remarkable modification in the lot of the people. Doubtless a perception of the inevitable result of opening the country to trade has been responsible for maintenance of the policy of isolation to which the lamas of Lhasa have clung so tenaciously.

From practically nothing ten years ago, the total Indian trade with Thibet has gradually increased until, for 1904-5, we find it valued at £250,000, roughly one-half emanating from Gartok in the west, and the other half passing through Chumbi, the outlet for products of the Tsangpo basin. Owing to imperfect registration in earlier years the expansion cannot be so great as these figures would indicate; but it is undeniable that the construction of roads in the west, and the improvement of communications through Sikhim in the east, have led to important increase in both export and import trade. And this advance has been made in spite of the imposition of duties and of active opposition on the part of Chinese and Thibetan officials on the frontier. With the disappearance of that opposition and the abolition of duties, as provided for in the recent treaty, an immediate and substantial increase may be anticipated. The present abnormal price of wool in Europe should also prove a valuable stimulus to its export to India, at what might be termed a psychological moment in the commercial relations between the two countries.

confronted the enemy whose presence outside our gates entails so large an establishment and so much expensive and elaborate preparation.

So, having left behind the mountains of Thibet and Sikhim, I proceeded to Simla, where it was necessary to obtain Government permission to cross the frontier into Central Asia. The Foreign Office put no difficulties in my way, and was indeed kind enough to arrange with the Chinese Government to allow me to travel in Turkestan. Permission to enter Persia was easily settled with the Consul-General of that country in Bombay. But for the most important part of my contemplated journey — that through Russian Turkestan — I could obtain no assistance, and was obliged to start altogether without credentials, trusting that correspondence with London would result in a passport meeting me at Kashgar, the capital of Chinese Turkestan. It required no small amount of optimism to face a pilgrimage 1500 miles long, over the three highest ranges of mountains in the world, with the possibility that at the end I would be blocked, and forced to retrace my steps. But a deep and abiding faith in circumstances belongs to the Scottish temperament, and I would indeed have been a traitor to my kail if I had abandoned my plans through excess of caution.

On the twenty-fourth day of May I set forth from Simla, attended by two servants and a modest caravan consisting of four laden mules. At Mashobra Tunnel we were clear of the town, and here I discarded the pony I had ridden so far, intending thereafter to tramp it, for the body's sake and for the chastening of the spirit. It was a long walk to contemplate, and while I had every intention of stepping the whole 1500 miles, I confess to mental reservations. My good resolutions were highly tried at the beginning, for the hot and dusty ridges along which the road winds proved

Bridge over the Sutlej near Narkanda—see page 85.

The Beas River where it leaves the Kulu Valley—see page 88.

most unpleasant walking. For many a mile there is nothing but stones, on one side avalanches of them streaming down into hot ravines, and on the other millions of cubic yards of them piled up into hills that must surely rattle flat at the next earthquake. But presently there comes a change in the scenery. Across one low pass there is a new world. Here are deodars clothing the hillsides, pine-needles strewing the road, green fields marking the slopes, while the smell of the firs gives joy to the nostrils. And now one walks in avenues of trees, listening for the cluck of jungle fowl and the whistle of blackbirds, tuning one's ear to the scream of a pheasant or the guggle of a tiny torrent that romps downhill. And so on the third day out one reaches Narkanda, 9000 feet above sea-level, and contemplates the deep dark gorge of the Sutlej overhung by precipitous mountains capped with snow.

From Narkanda to the Sutlej is about three miles as the crow flies, but owing to a drop of 6500 feet the road winds back and fore for fourteen miles. *En route* is Kumarsain, a village situated like an eagle's nest, and boasting the worst rest-house in Asia. The Rajah, who is supposed to harbour a loose tile—not to be wondered at on such a perch—was celebrating the birthday of his son and heir by a party, so I had to move on without making his acquaintance. It is a sore business going downhill, literally or metaphorically. When my little party reached the bottom the calves of our legs were just bunches of muscles and sinews that nothing could unravel. My old Mussulman bearer tried hot cocoa, lime-juice cordial, and cigarette-smoke without obtaining relief, and then gave it up as being the will of Shaitan.

From far above, the Sutlej looks an insignificant stream. But when one stands close by the roaring waters that career downhill in their narrow channel, one shudders at the fierce and lawless strength which they

exhibit. In these latter days of May the hot sun on the snows of the Thibetan boundary gives rise to innumerable torrents that all rush for the bed of the parent stream, and turn a reasonable river into a hell of grey surging water. The pace at which the current runs is tremendous. Huge billows plunge along and sometimes collide with each other, throwing columns of seething foam into the air. Massive trunks of trees are borne along with the speed of an express train, and tossed and twirled hither and thither like matches. Just below the bridge where we crossed, the river makes a sharp bend and the water races round a spur that projects from the inner bank. Here the stream makes a great swing to the outside, the water in the centre of the current surging along in a sloping bank the top of which is six feet higher than the slacker water under the spur. There is more water in the Niagara river, but for violence and impressiveness the Sutlej, swollen by the melting snows, is little inferior to the famous Rapids.

The price for a long descent is always a slow and toilsome effort to regain lost ground, and the 4000 feet of climbing which landed us at Dularsh is an episode to be wiped out of the mind. The rest bungalow at Dularsh is one of those oases which the Indian Government delights to establish for the weary traveller. From the verandah you look straight across to Kumarsain and Narkanda, the eye bridging the tremendous chasm wherein the Sutlej flows, and ranging over an immense expanse of mountainous land. Just to sit in that verandah brings peace to the soul. We were now in Kulu, the loveliest of Himalayan valleys, whose very name—Kulu—conjures up visions of wooded ravines and running water, green meadows and lazy cattle. But Kulu is a big country, and the main valley was some distance ahead.

There is still a range of mountains to traverse, and many passes, the highest of which, measuring 10,500 feet, bears the euphonious name of Jalaori. One day, while we were grinding up a slope of 2000 feet, there suddenly turned a corner two strapping natives carrying a litter. Two long thin bamboos stretched from one pair of shoulders to the other, and hanging in between was a cradle with a hood. Under the hood sat a round apple-cheeked baby with yellow hair and deep-blue eyes. The coolies stopped and I stopped, and the baby and I gazed raptly at each other, until a man in a topee came along and gave me greeting. While he talked I was studying the little soul in the cradle—eighteen months, and a girl, and the living incarnation of a cherub! At first I thought the man was a missionary, but from the words he used in referring to troublesome natives I concluded that he could hardly belong to an evangelical profession. Then more family came along, mother and daughters, and they all talked to me at once. They hadn't seen a European for weeks.

It was a happy meeting, for they were kindred spirits. They had begun at Simla, like myself, with a train of mules carrying tents, camp-beds, stores, and the usual paraphernalia of travellers in the wilderness. They had gone straight into the hills for a week, and then camped on the slope of a mountain, to the joy of their souls and the glorification of their complexions. They were now returning to civilisation, and bewailing the necessity. The father walked, the baby was carried like a little princess, and mother and daughters rode—not on sleek-skinned Arabian steeds, but on pack-mules and pack-saddles. No habits, no pommels, just short skirts and the natural way of sitting a horse, which is a leg on each side. The ladies wore their hair down, in long ringlets in which were entwined the lovely wild-flowers of the country. They had goats marching with them

to supply milk, which reminds me that while I was drinking in the whole family with envy and appreciation, the father told me of an adventure with a leopard that walked into the camp one night and tried to carry off something. He showed me the mark of the brute's teeth on the neck, but I can't remember now whether it was on the baby or on one of the goats. Anyway, they had enjoyed themselves completely. So easy, so cheap, and so delightful a way of making holiday is surely worthy of emulation.

Then we crossed the Jalaori Pass, which afforded a wonderful view of snow-capped mountains and forest-clad hills, and dropped down into the bed of the Beas river, the second of the five famous rivers of the Punjab to be negotiated. It was near the source of the Beas that I went fishing with an Aryan brother. He came provided with a net like a petticoat, weighted all round the bottom with marbles of lead. At the waist the net was gathered together on a rope, which the fisherman held while he tossed the petticoat into the river in such a manner that it spread out to its full extent, a circle of four to seven feet according to the skill of the throw. When the net lands on the water the weighted hem sinks sharply to the bottom, and if any fish happen to be underneath they are nabbed. In this fortuitous manner my friend secured seven fishes weighing seventeen ounces, and then retired with a bonus of eight annas to the bosom of his family.

As we approached the Kulu Valley the mountains closed in and forced the road into narrow gorges of great beauty and grandeur. Here are gigantic precipices, deep pools, and roaring waterfalls. The last chasm in the mountains through which the Beas tears like a cataract out of the main valley of Kulu is especially fine, there being what looks like a sheer drop of 3000 feet into the foaming water, while on either hand the

Scenes in the Kulu Valley—see page 89.

mountains tower to heights of 10,000 and 12,000 feet. Roads in these regions are precarious constructions, for the snow in winter ruins them, while the spring thaw causes landslips and avalanches of rock which sweep them away entirely.

At Bajaora is the residence of Colonel Rennick, and the location of the orchards famous throughout India for apples, pears, plums, and other fruit. No sooner had the Colonel heard that I was domiciled in the Dak Bungalow than he came to my rescue, and I soon found myself installed in his comfortable house surrounded by trees in full blossom. Unluckily I was too early for fresh fruit, but I took great liberties with apple-rings and dried pears, the preparation of which the Colonel undertakes in the latest and most scientific manner. I heard all about the inception of his orchards, which began at nothing and now cover some hundreds of acres of ground. Colonel Rennick knew naught of horticulture at the beginning, but by dint of earnest study of fruit-growing he has become an accomplished and successful fruit-farmer. Some of his experiments filled me with wonder, for, apparently, he has but to graft a French cutting upon a gooseberry-bush or a thistle to obtain the most beautiful apples and pears. Then he paints the trunks of his fruit-trees white, and tars other parts, generally interfering with the processes of nature.

Sultanpore is the capital of Kulu, and one of the most truly exquisite spots on the face of the earth. Out of the door of the Dak Bungalow there is a perfect lawn of green grass, in which are trees, singly and in avenues, that would grace a ducal park in England. From the edge of this broad lawn you look down a precipice to the river below, where are meadows with cattle, and smaller streams meandering in every direction. The bazaar begins at the foot of a deep ravine, through which roars a burn, crossed by picturesque bridges.

The narrow road between the shops is a stairway to the top of the ravine, and you step up it on great stone flags. Overhead are balconies that cross from side to side, and trees that add to the shade, constituting a picturesque and old-world scene that would be hard to rival. Up and down the river there is the most magnificent view. I was at Sultanpore on the 31st of May, when dwellers on the plains are gasping in the heat. Here the temperature was deliciously mild, and walking in the heat of the day perfectly comfortable, though the height above sea-level is only 4000 feet.

From Sultanpore to Nagar there are fourteen miles of perfect scenery and surroundings. Lanes and fields, brooks and rivers, are everywhere. Tremendous mountains tower on either side, and beautiful trees grace every feature of the landscape. At Nagar I was the guest of General Osborn, and spent two nights in his snug and picturesquely situated bungalow. The General, though no longer in his *première jeunesse*, is a great sportsman, and is able to gratify his tastes in the most enviable manner. He frequently shoots a bear before breakfast, for there is a nullah full of them immediately behind his house. During the day he can shoot pheasant, woodcock, and chuckor, and in the evening catch a basketful of trout in the Beas. All of those diversions are within easy walking distance. And if you like to climb, there are ibex galore. Truly the Kulu Valley is a corner of Paradise.

But this beautiful valley knows what trouble is. The earthquake which created so much damage in Kangra in 1905 was no less calamitous here. Twenty thousand people lost their lives in Kulu, and inestimable damage was done to property. Nearly every village is in ruins, and the signs of destruction are visible in every direction. The Kulu houses are built of loose stones, with a wooden framework on the top. On this a ceiling of

heavy flat stones is laid loosely. In the earthquake, which occurred in the early morning, these stones were shaken down on the unfortunate inmates, whole families being crushed like flies. Building operations are in full swing, and everybody has become a carpenter or a mason at unheard-of pay. Colonel Rennick's houses at both Bajaora and Nagar were badly wrecked, and members of his family narrowly escaped with their lives. Curiously, General Osborn's house, which is perched on an enormous rock fixed in the hillside, was absolutely unshaken, though, a hundred yards off, the pictures on Colonel Rennick's walls were swung outward and dashed back with their faces inward, while a grand piano was overturned.

At Nagar is Nagar Castle, an ancient residence of the Rajahs of Kulu, renovated to accommodate the Assistant Commissioner, who is responsible for the administration of an enormous district, including Kulu, Lahoul, Spiti, &c., comprising 60,000 square miles of territory. Mr Calvert has a busy and adventurous time of it, visiting the snow-bound and impenetrable recesses of his charge. And in selecting him to visit Gartok last summer in the interests of trade at this newly opened mart, the Government have appointed an official with much experience both of the kind of country and the kind of people who inhabit Western Thibet. Nagar Castle suffered but little in the earthquake, probably because the stonework is well cemented and intersected with enormous beams of wood supposed to be over a thousand years old.

Nowhere in India can there be scenery to match that between Nagar and Manalli. Take the most picturesque glen in bonnie Scotland, surround it with a towering ring of snow mountains, give it a clear blue sky and a few fleecy white clouds, and you will have conjured up something like the upper part of the valley of Kulu. Dropping down from Nagar to the bed of the Beas

river is a feast for the senses, for at every step one encounters something to attract the eye and please the imagination. Here a rustic bridge over a leaping torrent; there a grassy dell through which a tiny canal runs clear and joyous; a lane between an avenue of trees; and every now and then a glimpse of the panorama of lofty shining mountain, tree-covered slope, and silver river.

At Manalli there is still another attraction. Here lives Captain Banon, famous like Colonel Rennick for his fruit-growing, and his orchard in these days is one mass of black, ruby, and pink-and-white cherries. There cannot be less than fifty trees loaded with fruit, and to walk among them and sample the different kinds is a pastime for gods. Alas! that these delicious mouthfuls must perish for want of people to eat them. India is too far away for the transport of cherries, which do not stand travelling like more robust fruit. And so the birds have a continual feast, as well as Captain Banon's neighbours.

To Rahla is a repetition of the road to Manalli, except for 3000 feet of climb. Here I was disappointed to find that fowls, eggs, and milk were unprocurable, and that the only thing to be bought was a living sheep with a voice like the ram in Revelation. But at 9000 feet the air is champagne, and the view to the south glorious beyond words. Here is the take-off for the Rotang Pass. 13,500 feet is a moderate height to a Thibetan traveller, but to cross where lie the bones of two hundred men who perished in the pass some years ago is quite a new experience. It seems that the gut in the hills which constitutes the Rotang is used as a funnel by the whole of the mountain system to the north. The Kulu Valley warms the atmosphere, and up it goes. Then down comes the cold air from the snows of Lahoul in replacement. It all comes over the Rotang, and if human

A House in the Kulu Valley—see page 92.

Castle of the Thakur of Lahoul—see page 95.

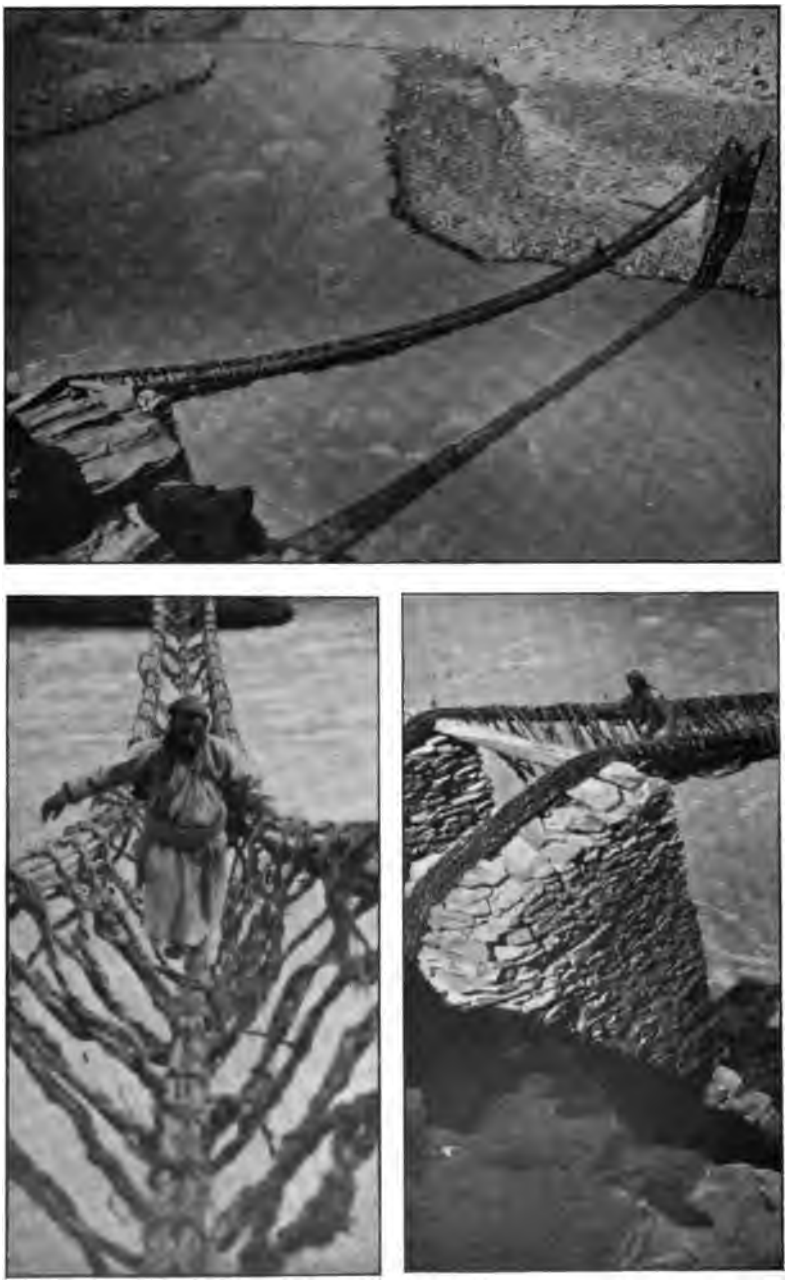
beings happen to be there during the process they are transfixed by the cold.

To avoid this fate I started before daylight and made good a portion of the climb before the sun rose. By seven we were on the top and marching upon snow. Ponies or mules are impossible until the snow disappears, and I was now equipped with coolies—twelve rascals with weak hearts and no lungs, for by no other reason could I account for the frequency with which they rested. It was a busy morning in the pass, for a number of shepherds had been waiting their chance, and were now availing themselves of fine weather to lead their flocks across. Sheep and goats are pretty steady on their feet, and so their owners take them by the straightest road, which here meant over landslips and snowslides by a track just broad enough for one beast at a time. Involved in a flock, I found it impossible to get clear, and so was compelled to march for nearly an hour surrounded by the protests and lamentations of many times ninety and nine.

CHAPTER IX.

LAHOUL AND ZANSKAR.

LOOKING over into Lahoul from the Rotang Pass there is a wonderful view of glaciers, how many being within range of the eye it would be hard to say. Spiti, Lahoul, Chamba, and Zanskar are all countries where the mountains frequently attain the height of 20,000 feet, and snow-covered peaks soaring into the heavens surround on all sides the traveller standing on the Rotang Pass. Kulu and its beautiful green hillsides and ravines are forgotten in this new vista of ice and rock. Lahoul is practically treeless, and nothing but a wilderness of mountain-tops and rocky precipices greets the visitor who crosses its inhospitable boundary. A severe drop brings one to Koksur, a city of one house and a Government rest-bungalow. But here are thirty or forty tents containing wild people bound north or south, semi-nomads from Baltistan, Thibet, Spiti, and other wild and bleak regions. They are just civilised enough to send their children hunting for buksheesh, and retain just enough of native dignity not to do the importuning themselves. They are all hopelessly unwashed and tattered, but warm-looking and jolly. The clothing of the men is what you may see in any hill-station bordering on Thibet, while the women have divers methods of doing their hair and wearing their jewellery, which atones to some extent for the bagginess of their figures.



Twig Bridge over the Chenab.

The human form is not idealised in hill countries, nor the human countenance either, judging by the appearance of the ladies. But the amount of turquoise, coral, jade, and other semi-precious stones in their headdresses gives them a social position relatively equal to that of their sisters in lands where physical beauty and mental charm constitute feminine attractiveness.

From Koksur one marches along a valley bounded on one side by a curtain of rock which I cannot but think must have no parallel in the world. At the bottom flows the Chandra river, known later in India as the Chenab, here a grey rushing cataract swollen by water from the melting ice. The level of the river is just under 10,000 feet, and from its bed rises a great rampart of rock that stretches up, and ever up, until at nearly 21,000 feet it ends in everlasting snow. From the top of the mountain to the bed of the Chenab is 10,500 feet of what looks almost sheer drop. The road runs along the opposite side of the valley, perhaps two thousand yards from this wonderful precipice, against which one might throw a stone and catch it on the rebound, so close does it appear. At Sissu we halt for the night under the shadow of this leviathan of nature, which hides itself in clouds towards evening and declines to be photographed. At Sissu there lives a Thakur of Lahoul whose idea of habitation is in harmony with his surroundings. The tower in which he lives, set on a hummock over against the stupendous battlements rising from the gorge of the river, is a triumph of architectural fitness, and a permanent tribute to the perceptions of his forefathers. The present poor gentleman is quite unconscious of the magnificence of his environment, and has done nothing for his tower but barely preserve it from ruin. But a thousand years back, when his ancestors were kings in Lahoul and the British Raj had not turned the hearts of native chiefs into water, some old freebooter

of the mountains was an artist as well as a warrior bold.

Kyelang is the capital of Lahoul, and is just a village perched on a slope that careful irrigation and cultivation has turned into an oasis amidst the rocky wastes wherein it is situated. A Moravian Mission has been established here for many years, to the material profit of the locality, but to little apparent advantage from a spiritual point of view. The people remain Hindu and Mussulman and Buddhist, and just go to the Padre Sahib for medicine, as they do in most places in India. A few converts make excellent woollen stockings, jerseys, and Balaclava caps for the chilly passes leading to Ladakh, and so, at a moderate price, some benefit does accrue to humanity. Nevertheless good example remains a powerful factor in human evolution, and who knows but that generations hence the good seed will bear fruit. But bodies bred in the snow nourish desperately hard hearts, and it is difficult to understand by what inversion of natural law shall a Buddhist by temperament ever come to desire Christian salvation.

Kyelang is a lonely place in winter. For many months the passes are closed and no post comes from India, nor is any communication with the outer world possible. Everywhere the snow is feet deep, and the inhabitants retire to their houses with food and firing, and never emerge until the drifts have melted from before their doors. Bears do this, and mice, and caterpillars, and many varieties of living organisms. Hibernation must be a great enemy to the development of soul, and it may be that the link running between mankind and his animal image may yet be discovered in countries where the cold compels inaction for half the year. That corner of the Himalayas where is Spiti, Lahoul, and kindred regions I commend to the researches of the anthropologist.

Lahoulis inspecting Photographs through a magnifying-glass.

Beyond Kyelang is the Bara Lacha Pass, 16,500 feet, and impassable to horses in those days, so they told me. Therefore, if I am so wilful as not to stay in the metropolis of Lahoul for a month, I must provide me with coolies, and my coolies with coolies to carry food, and these coolies with more coolies to carry blankets and prayer-wheels and cooking-pots, and the devil only knows what else. Nine brawny rascals can easily carry all I have, but when we file out of Kyelang there are no less than eighteen sons of Shaitan bending their backs in my service and at my expense. They say that for three days firewood is non-existent, and that for nine days we shall be in the wilderness where nobody lives and supplies are unprocurable. When I protest at the number, they answer that otherwise they must die of cold and starvation, conclusive argument to the pudding-hearted Sahib.

After two days of the most melancholy progress, during which neither prayers nor prods had any lasting effect, we found ourselves camped in the loneliest ravine in Lahoul. This we had to penetrate for many miles in order to find an ice-bridge across a torrent, the proper bridge over which had been swept into the Punjab by a flood from the everlasting snows. At this point two native travellers walked into camp and said that they had intended to go to Ladakh by the Bara Lacha, but had found on approaching the pass that it could not be crossed because of the deep snow. Instantly I had eighteen kneeling figures crouched around me, their hands clasped in an attitude of despair and their eyes streaming with tears.

The end of it was that I was diverted from the Bara Lacha to another pass which these timid ones assured me was both easier and shorter. They told me the exact number of stages to Leh by the Shingo La, and said there was milk and honey at every stopping-place. They

hid three-quarters of their own supplies under a rock, and henceforth were willing to tramp like Trojans—if only the Sahib would not sacrifice their lives in the terrible Bara Lacha Pass. I was persuaded chiefly because the Shingo La is a route very little known, and because I should cross country in which few Europeans had travelled. I had my doubts about the shortness of the road, else why was not so easy and charming a way the recognised route to Ladakh? And ere long I was to have ample confirmation of my misgivings in regard to distance.

This change of plan was signalled by an immediate plunge into the mountains. We climbed up a terrible slope that seemed to lead nowhere but into eternal snow. And just when one felt assured that the coolies had lost their way, we came to a narrow gut which offered a passage through the range that hitherto had skirted the main valley. We camped that night at 15,000 feet, and the thermometer registered 5 degrees below zero, this in the month of June, and within a hundred miles almost of the hottest part of India. But here I shot my first ibex, whereby my recollections of that camp are pleasant. The coolies brought word that a small herd was feeding within sight of my tent, and from the door thereof I beheld seven of them about 1500 feet up. They were at the top of a big landslip, and feeding under a magnificent precipice. I got the Mauser out, and after a long and backsliding climb, reached within 300 yards of them. It was nearly dark, and even with the glasses I found it difficult to distinguish between male and female, or indeed to see what sort of heads they had. I selected one gentleman as being the best, and moved another 50 yards nearer, when the does began looking in my direction and edging nearer the bucks. So at 250 yards I took a shot, and missed, owing to the oil in the bolt being frozen and stiffening the trigger-pull. Fortunately

A Gorge below the Shingo La.

A broken Ice Bridge.

I lay tight, and after some hesitation the males began feeding again. This time the rifle was warm and the trigger responded at once, and over toppled the ibex, struck just below the wither. The steepness of the ascent will be realised when I explain that after being hit he rolled all the way down to my coolies, who were waiting at the bottom of the slope, a distance of nearly 1000 yards. As I expected, the head was a small one, measuring only 22 inches, and not worth taking away as a trophy. But I had fired more for the pot than anything else, and the eighteen coolies rejoiced that night in unlimited meat. Ibex is hard eating to my mind, but the kidneys are as fat and juicy as those of a Southdown.

The Shingo, or Shinkal, Pass was an episode which will dwell in my memory after the manner of bitter aloes in the mouth. The coolies, brave of heart and strong of body in consequence of an overdose of ibex flesh, explained that it was an easy and short distance to the next halting-place, always provided that we started early in the morning. And to allow of the performance of so excellent a strategic move I ordered all the cooking paraphernalia to be packed up at night, that there might be no delay in the morning. By so doing I agreed to forgo breakfast, stipulating only that I might be provided with a *chupatti* for my pocket. Long before dawn I was aroused, with the thermometer showing 3 degrees below zero, and bundled off — no *chupatti* being forthcoming, owing to the forgetfulness of my cook, a Mussulman of great age, much piety, and very little sense. I calculated upon a four hours' march, and then a whacking breakfast to make up for omitted nourishment. Like most calculations, especially those made in high altitudes, it went agley, and my sufferings were as follows.

Whoso rises before the sun in a mountainous land,

where ice and snow bind the hilltops into long serrated battlements of gleaming white, discovers secrets of Nature that are never permitted to those who dwell in cities and sleep in bed until breakfast-time. Nor does it seem fair that those should tell of it who witness the mystic ceremonies with which broad day floods a region of glaciers. It is not playing the game with the showman when you explain to your friends what are the marvels behind his sixpenny curtain. The showman desires his customer just to stimulate the curiosity of the others by hinting at what there is to be seen, merely suggesting the strange and wondrous. And that is all I may do for the gentle reader; indeed all I am able to do, for it has not yet been given to mortal eyes to see, or brains to appreciate, all the miracles of light and shade and colour that happen when the red sun rises out of the east and paints the dim white canvas awaiting him.

Tramping over the crisp snow, to the rumble of sub-glacial torrents, we saw the transformation from beginning to end. At first all around was dead white, while high up on either side there were indefinable grey masses against skies of a depth of blue that was almost black. We were marching at 15,000 feet, and as the surrounding hills were over 20,000 feet high, their tops caught the light long before we did. One by one the peaks were lit up, like lighthouses when night approaches. First the light was rosy red, then it faded to pink that gradually waned to dazzling silver. From mere points there spread downward expanses of colour that ever broadened, rich and warm at the outset, pale and cold as their area increased. And so it became day.

While the sun tinted the hilltops from below the horizon we walked in fairyland, but when he rose up bright and hot, and flashed his rays from the dazzling snow into our eyes, we suffered the torments of the damned. We adopted spectacles of black and blue and green glass,

The Shingo La.

Baggage coolies crossing a bridge in Zanskar.

and toiled forward, up slopes that were never surmounted except to show others in front. The climbing was not very hard, and the snow was firm and comfortable to the feet. But when four hours had gone by and there still stretched in front of us a long unbroken ascent, one became painfully conscious of a labouring heart and the void in Little Mary. The aneroid kept registering its thousands, as telegraph-poles mark the advance of a train. One's head was swelling and burning, eyes and legs were aching, and lungs and heart felt like volcanoes within one's chest. After six and a half hours of interminable exertion we stood in the pass, and made vows for the future — never again to do such deeds. The aneroid said 18,700, which I knew was a lie, for the top of a known 20,000-footer near by looked a good 3000 feet above us. As we rested I ate snow by the cubic foot in the vain endeavour to quench thirst and satisfy the vacuum. The downward journey was easier, but the snow was slippery and the descent steep, and the fatigue engendered by those hours of toil was enough to turn a man into a jelly-fish.

A redeeming feature there was to that day's march. One long smooth stretch of snow ended in a little valley, perhaps 1000 feet down, at an angle of 45 degrees. My followers began zigzagging their way, floundering and stumbling in pitiable fashion. Inspired, I sat down with my alpenstock trailing behind. Gravity did the rest. At first it was merely a swoop, then it developed into a whizz, and after that balance and alpenstock became as naught. By grace this blessed career was ended head-first in a snow-drift. That thousand took me five seconds to descend, and perhaps fifty more were spent in shaking off the snow. The coolies took a solid hour getting down, so I was a great gainer in body and spirit —always barring the effects of illegitimate use on that part of the human frame designed by Providence for a

less exciting purpose. It was three in the morning when I started on an empty stomach, and it was just three in the afternoon when my breakfast appeared. Indeed you do pay a big price to see the Himalayas. But then one sees something worth seeing, something worthy of remembrance to the end of one's days.

Down at 14,000 feet we were clear of snow, and in a country of bare rock and glacial torrents. A village called Karjiak was our first sight of habitation after five days in the wilderness. Here we rested half a day, and made up for loss of sleep and recent short-commons. When we took the road it was with yaks, not the speediest of transport, but a great improvement on coolies. Thereafter we traversed a wild and desolate country, without trees or houses, and over tracks that wandered along the faces of precipices and upon the brinks of rushing cataracts. At this time we encountered the Zanskar river, one of the most tumultuous tributaries of the Indus. Zanskar itself is a province of Kashmir, and though containing 3000 square miles of territory, its population is no more than 2500, and the revenue but Rs. 2000. For seven months of the year it is absolutely closed to the outside world by snow, while inter-communication is impossible owing to the avalanches that continually plunge into the narrow valleys. And even after the greater part of the winter snow has melted, travelling is next door to impossible, owing to the furious torrents that race down every mountain-side and defy the courage of the boldest villager. In one deep ravine through which the Zanskar roars I looked up to the top of a precipice that towered into the air some 1500 feet, and beheld a sight that I had thought was confined to picture-books. Standing on a desperate ledge that seemed a mere protuberance on a smooth perpendicular wall was an ibex, clear against the sky. Ears, horns, legs, and tail were perfectly distinct, and the attitude exactly

as I have seen it drawn. Truly truth is stranger than fiction.

And now we arrived at Padam, once the capital of Zanskar, and still the location of a small fort. Here we strike a small community of Mahomedans, and for the first time since leaving Kyelang are able to communicate with the inhabitants of the country. From Padam we continue along the bank of the Zanskar to Zangla, which boasts a Rajah of great dignity and mighty few acres. This sportsman at nightfall sent round two watchmen to guard the camp. Having found universal honesty among these primitive hill people, I inquired why it was necessary to have protection, and was delighted to hear that the danger arose, not from covetous humanity, but from prowling wolves, who take what they can in the way of meat, and are not above making a snap at a sleeping man if nothing better offers. Bundling the watchmen out of camp, I caused a hind quarter of an ibex to be placed at the door of my tent. I then went to bed with a loaded rifle, the flap of the tent open so that I could command the ibex leg, and any beast that interfered with it. I kept awake for a good number of hours, and then fell asleep without having seen a sign of wolf. But the ibex meat was gone in the morning.

Then for the wilderness once more. And such a wilderness! For three days we were literally lost in the mountains, crossing each day passes measuring 16,000 feet, divided by gorges deep and gloomy. Though four ponies usually suffice to carry all the baggage, we were here compelled to have both coolies and yaks, ten of the former and six of the latter. It was only possible to move in the track of torrents, owing to the precipitous nature of the hills. These torrents had to be crossed and recrossed continually, impossible operations without the yaks, which are able to keep their feet where men would be swept away. Occasionally we were forced to leave a

river-bed and climb a precipice. At one such place I had to discard my alpenstock and use my hands to climb. Here the yaks were unloaded and the packs carried by the coolies. How the yaks scrambled up I cannot conceive, but they are certainly able to negotiate places that test the nerves and agility of human beings. At another place the gorge narrowed to a breadth of 10 feet, while 200 feet above the walls were so close that a man could step from one side to the other. This dark chasm was choked by a small glacier that offered a cold green front 10 feet high. In this we spent an hour cutting steps, after which we crept along upon the ice in a weird tunnel, through which the roar of the stream underneath reverberated like thunder. At the other end we had to plunge into the icy water up to our waists, and wade up the gulley until the banks shelved sufficiently to offer a foothold. After hours of this sort of thing there would be 3000 feet to climb, and then a descent to the original level.

At Nera we struck the Zanskar river again, within fifty miles of its confluence with the Indus, which occurs quite close to Leh. But of this distance thirty miles is a deep and impenetrable gorge which I was told no human being has ever entered. It is believed to be a long tortuous fissure in the mountains, flanked by immeasurable precipices, through which the river careers at a terrific pace. The discharge of the Zanskar river is equal in volume to that of the Indus at Leh, according to Cunningham's estimate, and so one can guess at the fury of its passage down this unknown defile. It was maddening to look at a map and see that our destination was a bare forty miles off, yet to know that we must travel over a hundred miles to reach Leh, crossing several lofty and difficult passes on the way. From Nera we drop 1500 feet, cross the Zanskar, and then rise 5500 to the Singa La, 16,600 feet above sea-level. The top of the pass is filled with

snow, presenting to the north a straight wall some 50 feet high, down which we had to cut a staircase. The day after, having dropped to 13,000, we are again compelled to climb, this time over the Sirsar Pass, 16,372 feet, finally ending at the village of Wanla, 10,900 feet. Thereafter the road to Leh is comparatively easy, and our troubles over for the time being. But we had walked over 400 miles, the last 200 over country wilder and more difficult perhaps than any in the Himalayas, or in the world for that matter. Sportsmen avoid Zanskar because of its inaccessible nature, and other travellers there are none. The Rajah at Zangla told me that in the last ten years only two Europeans had visited his valley, and that he himself had only left it once in his life, to pay a visit to Ladakh. Nine-tenths of the sparse population have never been out of their own district, and there is practically no trade whatever, each community supporting itself by the growing of grain and the breeding of cattle. It was to this unnatural country that our Kyelang coolies had committed us, probably out of ignorance. But if ever I return to Kyelang I shall visit some of the trouble upon a certain man whose appearance and conversation are firmly fixed upon my memory.

I had meant to walk from Simla to Leh, but the toil in Zanskar had knocked up the servants, and we rode the last fifty miles. Owing to the diversion from the Bara Lacha route, we had tramped nearly twice the distance, and had surely deserved to ride, for it must be remembered that marching at levels between 12,000 and 17,000 feet entails the expenditure of far more energy than at sea-level. At Lamayura we struck the main road between Srinagar and Leh; and a bungalow and fresh eggs and fowls and vegetables! Crossing the Indus we entered Ladakh, and two days later came to a halt at Leh, and thanked Heaven for delivery from evil.

CHAPTER X.

A PARADISE FOR WOMEN.

THE inhabitants of those parts of Lahoul and Zanskar which I have described, and of all Ladakh, are Buddhist, at one time owning the sway of Lhasa, and still under the influence of Thibet in religion, dress, and language. The altitude at which they live, and the cold and rigorous climate which afflicts them in winter, render them exceedingly like the Thibetan both in manner and temperament. And it is a problem for the biologist whether the power of Buddhism, as interpreted by the Lamas of Thibet, is due to inherent merit, or whether some such creed as that taught by the Lamas is not the consequence of rarefied atmosphere and extreme cold upon human temperament. There is, at any rate, a remarkable resemblance between the ideas and customs of the people of Thibet and those of the peoples that dwell on her borders, either in the north, east, south, or west. Polyandry is a feature of the country that interests most people, and that has been widely discussed. To what extent the polyandry of this part of the world resembles that obtaining in other Himalayan states I am unable to say, but the usage in Ladakh and its neighbourhood is so quaint and curious that I cannot but think some description of it will prove acceptable. In many books I have read dealing with the subject, I have encountered little more than a statement of the general

principle which allots one wife to a family of brothers. How they apportion the affections of the lady, what becomes of her children, and how she may break her bonds and contract new ones, are matters upon which most writers are silent. Inquiries on my own part, supplemented by notes made by Lieutenant Ramsay, Joint Commissioner at Leh in the 'eighties, have put me in possession of much that I imagine is not generally understood. While I do not claim for my information that it is worthy of being embossed in gold, or of study by savants, I believe it is true as far as it goes, and that it in no wise misrepresents the actual customs of Ladakh, and neighbouring regions where Buddhism is professed.

Betrothal, one may assume, marks the first expression of that instinct to which humanity owes its existence. In Europe and Asia we find that the period of life at which marriages are arranged differs materially, and that the whole subject is governed by different ideas. In the West inclination is controlled by the ability to support, failing which society condemns a man to celibacy. In the Orient, matrimony, in some degree or another, is deemed an essential of existence, and a duty to mankind which no law-abiding person can ignore. In Europe they marry when they can, but in Asia the first flush of adolescence is the signal for the joining of the sexes, and social conditions are such that obstacles rarely intervene. In Ladakh they adhere to the Oriental view, but temper it with an entirely admirable regard for expediency. A girl in Ladakh is usually married about the age of eighteen, though she has reached womanhood some years earlier. Going home to several husbands, who may treat her as no better than a slave, it is just as well that development, both mentally and physically, shall have reached such a stage as will enable her to deal with a difficult situation. Custom, again prompted by expediency, enjoins upon a man the marrying of a girl

of his own age, partly because he is not capable of doing a man's work before the age of eighteen or twenty, and partly because, if older, the wedding of a young wife would be to invite complications in a country where the marriage tie is not regarded as sacred.

Marriage ceremony there is practically none, for custom and not law rules the matrimonial relation. The bridegroom goes to fetch his bride, and finds her male relations guarding the house. After some palaver he appeases them and proceeds to enter, when he finds himself surrounded by a horde of angry females, who beat him with small sticks and abuse him unmercifully. Presents propitiate them, as they do bridesmaids in other countries, and then there follows feasting and music and dancing, at which the bride does not appear. At the end of the evening the bride is produced from concealment and is marched off by her husband to his own home, after which the couple are regarded as man and wife. This husband hereafter is always the leading factor, though his younger brothers have equal rights in the wife, in such degree as the lady likes to accord them. The earlier days of the honeymoon are regarded as the prerogative of the chief husband, and it is when the young wife is getting pretty sick of number one that custom recognises a suitable moment for the intervention of number two. In such demand does the lady find herself in the early days of matrimony that she speedily gains ascendancy, and thereafter rules her husbands and the family property with tact and the judgment engendered by responsibility. Matters are so arranged, it has been said, that one husband usually remains at home while the others go abroad on business. But as a matter of fact there is no such delicacy necessary in a Thibetan household, the lady bestowing her favour when and where she chooses in the most open manner. Among better-class people it is the custom to limit the number of brothers to one

A young Married Woman of Leh.

A Ladaki Child.

wife to three, other brothers being expected to join a monastery, or make independent efforts to earn a living. But in lowlier circles all the brothers share in the wife, as they do in the family property.

Sometimes it happens that there is only one or two brothers in a family, and then it is the privilege of the wife, if she is not satisfied, to suggest the adoption of another brother and husband. If they can all agree to the individual, which as a rule there is no difficulty in doing, in he comes and joins the family circle as if he had been born to it. At other times it happens that the wife is not happy in her surroundings, and then she is liable to abscond and return to her parents. This generally leads to complications in regard to the price paid to the girl's father and to the clothes and goods she has brought to her husbands' house. As a rule the matter of divorce is amicably arranged, and the lady free to go home and contract a fresh alliance with a wealthier or better-tempered family. She has one opportunity of obtaining divorce on advantageous terms. At the death of the chief husband she may join herself to the corpse by a string, the severing of which denotes her desire to quit the family, which she does forthwith, taking all the property she brought with her, and making no return of the money originally paid to her father. If a woman has children she rarely leaves her home, for the children inherit to the exclusion of her other husbands, the brothers of the head of the family.

Incompatibility of temper is the chief excuse for separation, and if both parties are agreeable the matter is easily arranged. The brothers have no voice in the matter. Unfaithfulness on the part of the husbands is to be expected, and forms no ground for complaint. On the part of the wife it may be used as an excuse to get rid of her. But she must be caught *in flagrante delicto*, as circumstantial evidence is not admissible. This offence,

however, is regarded more as an infringement of private rights rather than a dishonour, and four or five rupees damages paid by the co-respondent will usually settle the matter. Where a divorce is arranged, children stay with the divorcee until about eight years old, when they return to their fathers, and in due course inherit the property. Divorced parties are free to marry again, the man indefinitely, the woman up to nine times, after which propriety enjoins widowhood.

Owing to the obligation of free labour to the state, one of the chief objects of matrimony is children. If they have no family to do the work required, parents must pay for substitutes, and so diminish the ancestral estate. Unfruitfulness, owing to the system of polyandry and the rigours of the climate, is not uncommon, and if the first wife has no issue the brothers may take unto themselves a second, and if necessary a third wife. Should children still not be forthcoming, custom enjoins the calling in of a *portak*, or fourth husband. If he fails they try one more husband and perhaps another wife, all which expedients failing in the desired result, adoption is resorted to. The senior husband and wife select from their respective families a marriageable boy and girl. Simultaneously with adoption the young pair are married. If in the fulness of time they are not rewarded with offspring, then the hand of God is deemed to lie heavily upon that household.

The lot of the younger sons of a family is frequently matter for commiseration. The one that takes to religion is far from being without compensation, though the somewhat divided joys of conjugal life are denied him. It is those who come so low down as fifth and sixth that are the sport of the gods, their future either poverty or affluence, the latter at the cost of liberty and individuality. It so happens in Ladakh that sometimes only girls are born into a family, and when this happens whole

æons of injustice to womanhood are rectified in the person of the eldest daughter. She is full and only heir to the family property, and if her father is a rich man, she is indeed a person to be envied. She never marries, yet she enjoys all the happiness of matrimony. She may have a hundred husbands, yet not one man in the world may call her to account. As childhood merges into womanhood her parents seek out a *makpo* for her, and all the spare men in the neighbourhood compete for the position. She takes exactly whom she chooses, and kicks him out in a week if she does not like him, in which case the law allows but a sheep as recompense.

At the age of twelve or thirteen the young heiress may have her *makpo*, whereas other girls must wait another five years for their husbands. The individual chosen, one of the aforesaid younger brothers, the girl's father proceeds to the *makpo's* home and goes through all the performances of a bridegroom taking possession of his bride. After much festivity the blushing *makpo* is handed over, escorted to the house of his mistress, and there delivered into her custody. From that moment he is her husband in the eyes of Ladakh. For a week or so high honeymoon is held in the house of the father-in-law, and the *makpo* is put through his facings. Within his grasp is fortune, love, progeny, and position. Yet his portion is frequently no more than—the sheep. Let him falter in his duty for a moment, and out he goes to make way for one of the dozen others who aspire to his shoes. Needless to say, the wise youth recognises his position and curbs the Old Adam. Then he lives in clover, his children inherit their mother's property, and he himself is an object of consideration. A young heiress may have an unlimited number of *makpos*, one at a time, and if her fancy should wander from the *makpo* of the moment, who is there to find fault? One curious custom is that which deals with a male child left alone in the world

with property. A grown-up woman is chosen and married to him, to be the nurse of his youth and the wife of his manhood. And when he reaches maturity the nurse does not grumble if he takes another wife more suitable to his years. She, we may be sure, has not wasted her youth.

Death claims its victims in Ladakh as elsewhere, giving rise to joy or sorrow in a degree that does not differ greatly from that of the West. With a lower nervous organisation we find, of course, less capacity for emotion, and a philosophy that accepts the decrees of Fate and Fortune with greater equanimity. In a country where life is so hard, the Great Mower is compelled to confine his reaping to the extremes of youth and age. A child that survives is hardy, and likely to live until old age overtakes him. The middle-aged seldom die, for they have developed constitutions of iron. And so death is not the tragedy in Ladakh that it is in softer climes, it being best for all that a weakly child should go, and for an old person there is no advantage in lingering in the cold. Besides, death here is not death at all, but only change to another body, and one more step towards the serene eternity which is the hope of the colder temperament of the disciple of Buddha.

When death does come, it is least unwelcome in winter, when there is no work to be done in the fields, and when there is time and opportunity to make the best of the occasion. In Lahoul and Zanskar the snow lies so deeply that for six or seven months the inhabitants are completely confined to their houses. But as a village consists of a clump of huddled buildings, communicating with each other like a rabbit-warren, the hardship is not so great as might be imagined, while the situation positively lends itself to conviviality and good-fellowship. In Ladakh there is little snow on the ground, but the extreme cold and the frozen soil make agricultural work

impossible, and so the Ladakhi is like his southern neighbour, idle and ready to be amused. If a man dies in summer, his body must be disposed of on the third day; but if he elects to become deceased in winter, his relatives have no less than fifteen long days in which to weep and feast over the corpse. Immediately after the occurrence of the sad event the local abbot is sent for, and underlings according to the wealth of the family. The abbot begins the ceremonies by reading out of a sacred book, which he holds in one hand, while with the other he grasps the hair of the corpse. He reads for half an hour, all the while jerking at the head of the deceased. If there is blood at the nose of the body by the time the reading is finished, it shows that the dead person has attained Nirvana, whereat the relatives rejoice. But failing blood, it is assumed that the spirit of the dead is wandering about in space awaiting re-embodiment. Rescue can only be effected by payment to the lamas, who will then pray vigorously for the departed. Needless to say the blood is seldom forthcoming, and much prayer and payment the usual portion of the broken-hearted relatives. The reading completed, attendants come with ropes and tie the corpse in a sitting posture, hands, knees, and neck bound closely together. If the corpse has stiffened and the operation is impossible, the bones are broken. Thereafter the body is wrapped in cloth and placed in a room to which only the lamas are allowed access. The holy men watch day and night, pray continually, keep lamps alight, and offer food to the deceased. At a propitious moment the body is placed in a coffin and carried to the burning-ground, where it is slowly roasted until, in three or four hours, a bone drops away. The burning of the body continues until complete, but the important thing is the bone, which is taken home by the lamas, pounded up with clay into a paste, and then fashioned into a little image. The burial of the

image according to the means of the deceased, and the last of a series of feasts, then ends the funeral ceremonies.

The lama who figures at these functions is a person upon whom much abuse has been showered. A celibate, he has been accused of ignoring his vows and devoting himself to the world, the flesh, and the devil. But that is a libel pure and simple — so far as Ladakh is concerned. In this part of the world there appear to be two distinct sorts of monasteries. One class of monk is allowed to take a nun to wife and to rear up children, but the other may not look at a woman, to take food from her hand even being an offence which entails a beating and ejection from the monastery. That the stricter monk adheres to his principles on the whole there can be no doubt. Backsliders exist in every community, and it would be absurd to suppose that purity of life is never departed from. But that it is set up as a standard and eagerly striven after, the people themselves thoroughly believe. While the lamas of the stricter kind live an austere and simple life, they are yet men of the world, with a keen eye to business and the honour and glory of their monastery. They spend nothing on themselves, but they will go through fire and water to augment the resources of the institution to which they have devoted their lives. The gompa, or monastery, is usually a large landowner, paying revenue to the Kashmir State at a rate equivalent to one-sixth of that paid by the ordinary land-holder. This advantageous assessment was secured by judicious bribery of the settlement officers, and by the concealment of the existence of cultivated land. Further, the lama has manœuvred himself out of the obligation of forced labour, and has imbued the villager with the belief that merit is to be acquired by the free cultivation of fields belonging to a monastery.

A nun is a person of little consequence in this part of

the world. She takes the veil for the same reason that a younger son takes it—because there is nothing else for her to do. In summer she lives with her people and slaves in the fields, and in winter, when there is rest and recreation at home, she has to return to her nunnery and devotional exercises. Perhaps her character is not all it might be from our point of view, but where the illegitimate exercise of the maternal function is regarded as merely venial, what else can be expected from her?

These dwellers among the hill-tops are simple, timorous, and kindly. Physically powerful, they are of a peaceful disposition, and fighting among them is unknown. Off the trade-route to Central Asia, where outsiders of lawless and turbulent character frequently intrude, there are no police, no courts, and no law. There is food and clothing for everybody, and little ambition for anything more. There are no paupers, for weaklings die in childhood, and strong men can always obtain food. If money comes the way of a Ladakhi, he spends it in feasting his neighbours. If a profitable outlet for trade presents itself, he lets the wily Kashmiri snatch it. If you punch his head he roars with laughter, and if he is caught in a snowstorm in a lofty pass, he will toil along with his heavy load uncomplainingly. This latter characteristic, however, refers only to the inhabitants of Spiti, Lahoul, and Zanskar, for the Ladakhi seldom does coolie work. At the end of his day's work he invariably begs for buksheesh—and a cigarette will content him. Thieving is unknown in Ladakh, and your money and your goods may lie open day and night. The Ladakhi is a great swiller of beer, and his joy is to get drunk every night. In his cups he is merry and good-natured, and would not hurt a fly. His liquor is *chang*, a weak fermentation of barley or other grains. There is no harm in it, and precious little intoxication. The effect on the drinker is

due not to the strength of the drink, but to the weak head of the drinker. He is a cheerful and happy individual, always gossiping when in company, and always singing lustily when at work in his fields, though that is not often, for the farm is mainly the province of the women.

CHAPTER XI.

LEH.

PHYSICALLY Leh has no rival in the world. Lying at a height of 11,500 feet, it boasts an atmosphere rarer than that of any other capital city. Its inaccessibility is incomparable, for it is three weeks' march from the nearest railway, fourteen days of which are along roads impassable to wheeled traffic, and which are completely blocked by snow for half the year. This path meanders across ranges of mountains, across deep valleys, and along river-beds that long centuries of erosion have carved out of the heart of the mountains. And when the traveller reaches the neighbourhood of Leh, he finds himself in a wilderness of hill, precipice, and boulder-strewn sand that has to be seen to be understood. A solid range of snow-clad mountains bounds the southern view, and a similar range on the north holds Leh within a hollow. Between the two ranges flows the Indus river, a fierce cataract in summer, mostly tearing its way through deep chasms in the primeval rock, but occasionally permitting itself to be seen in the open, when it careers across huge rocks and stones in foaming billows of dirty grey. North of the river is sandy plain dotted with masses of dark crumbling rock that frequently rise to heights of several hundreds of feet, and look like islands on a yellow lake. One of these rocks is surmounted by a magnificent building, whose tremendous steep walls are pierced by innumer-

able windows, and whose battlements look down upon a broad streak of green that lies immediately below. This is the ancient castle of the Gyalpos of Ladakh, and the trees nestling at its foundations hide the town of Leh.

Riding along an interminable sandy path, one slowly approaches the oasis that marks the existence of Leh. First, there are a few scattered houses framed in little green fields. Then there is the rocky bed of a tumbling burn, spanned by a rustic bridge. And then a narrow lane flanked by high stone walls and shaded by a few willow-trees. In the lane is a cluster of mud-houses, which one is about to pass when a gateway and a vista beyond suddenly catch the eye. You turn your horse's head, kick him up to the gate and look through. Inside is the town of Leh, unique in appearance, quaint and picturesque beyond anything conceivable, and majestic because of the towering walls that frown down upon it. A broad street runs right up to the foot of the rock, and thereafter terrace upon terrace of houses rise one above the other until the great curtain of wall denotes the foundations of the castle. Along one side of the street stands a row of prodigiously tall, slim, and perfectly straight poplars. Immediately behind the houses on the other side there is a high and solid backing of trees deeply laden with foliage. The houses are not much to look at, except perhaps those with the little carved balconies of Mahomedan architecture, and the Ladakhi dwellings that are embellished with heavy stone portals and lintels. But the exquisite grace of the perfectly proportioned poplars that sway slowly in the breeze, the mass of dark comforting green opposite, and the mighty, eye-compelling building that soars into the blue sky, make up a scene that for character or beauty could hardly be paralleled.

The population of Leh varies between 3000 and 7000 people, according to the time of year. In summer it

Leh—Castle of the Gyalpos of Ladakh, and a back street—note the height and slenderness of the poplars,—see page 118.

is crowded with Indian and Kashmir merchants bringing goods for dispatch to the north, and with Central Asian traders who have brought the products of Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan to exchange for Indian merchandise. When business is at its height the bazaar is crowded with people who talk with the volubility of travellers after a long and tedious journey. Clothes of different cut and diversified hue add strangeness and colour to a scene that is entirely reminiscent of the 'Arabian Nights.' The merchant from Yarkand is a personage straight from the pages that immortalise the bazaars of Middle Asia, and his servant is own brother to the loiterers with whom Haroun-al-Raschid rubbed shoulders in the Imperial city of Baghdad. The strange headdresses of the Ladakhi women, the long streaming hair of the natives of Baltistan, and the wild, shaggy, sheepskin-clad wanderers from the west of Thibet are other elements that transfix the attention, and help to make Leh one of the strange places of the earth.

There are just about a hundred of the poplars ranged along the street, as if they were soldiers keeping order among the crowds that surge at their feet. At the ground they measure perhaps 18 inches in diameter, whereafter they taper up to a delicate point that bends and swings with the wind 150 feet above the roadway. For a long way up they are as clean and smooth as the mast of a ship, and then they break out into little branches of leaves that might be bouquets nailed to the trunk. Some of the poplars have leafy branches that point upward like besoms set on end, but both varieties are the embodiment of grace and delicacy. How they stand the high wind that occasionally sweeps over these mountainous regions is an unsolvable mystery. In 1890 Lord Dunmore photographed this street, and the reproduction in his book shows that the poplars were then totally non-existent. That they should have

reached their present dimensions within a period of sixteen years seems almost incredible. Sometimes the poplars look down upon a holiday, when the street below is devoted to polo, dancing, and feats of horsemanship, while the town band yells defiance and the crowds applaud.

A game of polo is composed of all the sportsmen who like to join. The goals are fixed at either end of the street, and the players station themselves where it seems to them best. The roadway cleared, the onlookers all settled in the doorways, balconies, and upon the roofs of the houses, there enters at one end a little company of horsemen. These walk peacefully down the street until the report of a gun galvanises them into life, and they break into a fierce gallop. At the half-way mark the man in the centre of the bunch of tearing figures tosses a ball into the air, and as it descends hits it an all-sounding whack with a club that sends it spinning down the road, followed by an avalanche of pounding hooves. From the opposing goal-posts an individual darts out, and at, the leaping ball, his charge taking him slap into the coming rush, and to what appears to be certain death. But he emerges yelling, riding like a madman, and brandishing his club—and with the ball describing parabolas in front of him. The State Compounder! if you please, and the fat Post Office Baboo at his heels, roaring like a bull and backing up like a Blucher. Hither and thither the players surge, the ball speeding up and down, cannoning from side to side of the street, and sometimes landing in a crowd of women perched on a house-top. After every goal the band breaks into pæans that mingle with the plaudits of the people. A brief rest, and they come pounding down the street again. Everybody holds their breath while the ball is tossed up and is dropping to meet the unerring aim of the club that sends it flying. Helter-skelter follow the excited players! Out darts the Compounder! The Post

The Main Street of Leh—see page 119.

Ladakhi Head-dresses.

Office charges! The Yarkandi merchant saves! The Zemindar from up the road gains the ball! The Serai Manager takes it from him, and the Tehsildar strikes a goal with a blow from his club that sounds like the crack of doom! Phew! 'Tis both hot and fast, is polo at Leh. Afterwards a batch of Ladakhi women do a heavy dance, some Baltis squirm to music, and an ancient warrior swings two swords without cutting himself. Then a man comes tearing down the street at full gallop, firing a gun as he goes. Another comes careering along in a bent attitude, out of which his legs slowly rise into the air, the while balance is maintained by grasp of the stirrups. Then the bandsmen eclipse themselves, and the Sahibs climb down from their balcony, and the show is ended—barring the distribution of buksheesh.

From time immemorial Leh has been a link between India and Central Asia. Down to present times commerce has continued without interruption, middle age history and literature proving that its existence was well known both in India and Turkestan. In these days, however, the Russian penetration of Central Asia has endangered the old-established connection, and it is possible that a few decades will witness its disappearance. The extension of the Trans-Caspian railway to Andijan has further threatened the commerce with India, and with certain parts of Central Asia trade either languishes or has ceased entirely. Kashgar, for instance, is only eighteen days' march from the Russian railhead, but double that distance from Leh. Yarkand is a week's journey farther east from the new Russian centre, and so much nearer India. Khotan, again, is practically equidistant as regards the number of marches, though the expense of transport to Leh must be considerably heavier than to Andijan. According to the relative positions of these places, as regards British and Russian centres, has trade been affected, Kashgar, the farther, showing diminution, Khotan, the nearer,

cheaper than ever. But this year's importation of *charas* is much lower, and the import probably will be still lower in future, with the result that Yarkandi merchants hereafter will have a smaller amount of money to spend in India. Thus the vicious tendencies of the Punjabi have been checked by legislation, and we are left wondering whether it is really the case that the finding of a Commission has improved human nature—or merely deflected its inherent wickedness into other channels.

Present-day exports and imports average about Rs. 25,00,000 annually, nearly equally divided. In 1904-5 there were 10 lakhs of merchandise each way, plus an import of Russian gold to the extent of another 5 lakhs, due chiefly to indebtedness from the previous season.

Leh is also a connecting-link with Thibet in respect to trade, and particularly as a convenient starting-point for explorers. With Western Thibet there is commerce worth about 4 lakhs per annum, of which the principal item is the import of wool. But with the recent opening of the Chumbi Valley in Eastern Thibet there is a tendency to reduction in the quantity, which is likely to be accentuated in the future owing to the attractions of the eastern road, and because the Indian Government is making endeavours to develop the newly opened mart at Gartok, from which the nearest route to India is *viâ* Almora. But travellers continue to find Leh a suitable base for exploring expeditions, Bower in 1892, Wellby in 1896, Bruce in 1905, and Sven Hedin this year (1906), choosing it as the point at which to equip themselves prior to their journeys into Thibet. Many others have left Leh and crossed the border of Thibet, nourishing the vain hope of reaching the goal of nineteenth-century exploration — Lhasa. But none has succeeded, unless perhaps the hapless Moorcroft, whose fate to this day is wrapped in mystery.

CHAPTER XII.

KHARDUNG AND SASER PASSES.

LEH is a point in the journey of a traveller whereat he must harden his heart, or confess to an irresistible desire for return to the fleshpots. From here there lead two great roads, the one ending at Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir proper, that land of wood and water, milk and honey, sweet fruit and balmy climate which has been rightly termed the Eden of Asia; the other leading due north into the cold and inhospitable region of mountain and glacier that even in these days of enterprise and travel remains practically unknown. The road to Srinagar is the way back to India and to civilisation, but the northern road, after the transit of the lofty Karakoram system of mountains, debouches upon one of the most fascinating and remote corners of the earth. Central Asia is a geographical expression of little meaning except to those few whose business it is to study the remoter borders of great empires, that encroachment may not happen or opportunity be lost. Yet who has not read of Bokhara, of Samarcand, of Yarkand?—those magic cities of the East that enthralled one's fancy when deep in the pages of the greatest story-book of all time. It is hard to believe even now that they are realities, and not part of the floating and mysterious world conjured up by the power of genii or the secret servants of the lamp of Aladdin. Does the reader remember

the pictures in that priceless volume—the tall turbans, the tarbooshes, the flowing robes, the grey beards, and the pointed curling shoes of those stately and dignified figures that rode upon caparisoned mules, or upon Arab steeds with arching necks and graceful tails? Such an very one came to me in Leh the other day and salaamed. Was not the Sahib going to Yarkand? And the Sahib said he was.

Behind Leh there is a mass of mountains, brown in the nearer spurs, purple in the farther heights, and streaked with white along the broken ridge that denotes the backbone of the range. In this ridge there is a suggestion of a dip, and in the dip a little knob. An afternoon's walk it looks, and a climb of perhaps 2000 feet. But the huge rock which the knob is in reality marks the Khardung Pass, nigh 18,000 feet high, the first of many obstacles that bar the way to the north. To negotiate this barrier it is necessary to resort to the faithful yak, a brute of much patience, great docility, and good wind. A day of toil and the foot of the pass is gained. A night's rest and the taste of 20 degrees of frost precede a climb of 3000 feet, and the attainment of a height that is entirely inappropriate to human existence. But our adventures in Zanskar had hardened my servants, and they made no complaint either of head or stomach. Curious as to the possible effect of the altitude, despite recent experiences, I made the ascent on foot as fast as I was able, taking an hour and forty minutes for the 3000 feet. To my satisfaction the only result was a slight compression of the brain which hardly amounted to inconvenience. Horses are unable to carry a load up such a steep road in this altitude, and when crossing the Khardung unloaded they frequently bleed at the nose, and sometimes die. Even the yaks suffer considerably, and their skeletons are strewn about the top of the pass, testifying to the severity

Yaks crossing the Khardung Pass, 18,000 *feet*—see page 127.

Thibetan Antelope shot near the Karakorum Pass—see page 161.

of the road and the pluck with which they are endowed.

Looking backward over the valley of the Indus, there is a magnificent view of the mountains south of Leh. They lie in a long straight line dotted with peaks between 21,000 and 22,000 feet, and presenting no gap less than 20,000 feet in height. The snow-line at 18,000 feet is remarkably clear and well defined, the effect resembling a filmy white frieze coupling a huge purple wall and a ceiling of deep blue. Turning to the north the view is circumscribed by the nearer hills, and one has to be content with a less extensive outlook. Nevertheless the northern aspect of the Khardung is impressive. The pass consists of a knife-like ridge with a steep descent on either side. The southern front is faced with huge stones and boulders, among which the track threads its way, twisting hither and thither as it gradually works its way to the top. Here and there lie patches of snow that are fast disappearing before the warmth of the summer sun. Immediately over the edge of the ridge, however, one finds oneself upon a glacier that has encumbered the route to Central Asia as far back as records go. Fed from the snow that never leaves the northern slopes of the two low peaks closely flanking the pass, it forms a curtain clinging to the steep descent which cannot be avoided. The surface resembles the appearance of a city of churches, consisting of phalanxes of thin spires and steeples of ice from between which the snow has melted. These hollows are soft and treacherous, and many an exhausted animal laboriously picking his steps over the uneven surface plunges forward upon his chest, never again to recover footing. Under the pass the foothills close in and form a narrow ravine which affords the only possible means of advance. Right down into the ravine, at a fearfully steep angle, hangs the glacier, its foot marked by a

series of deep-blue frozen lakes that, far below, end in a silver thread of foaming water. Down this uncanny slope the patient yaks step warily, tacking backward and forward like ships in a head-wind. A batch of ponies in front are falling and floundering in woful fashion, though they are unencumbered by loads. One unhappy little beast drops both forefeet into a bad place, and makes exhausting but unavailing efforts to lever himself out by means of his elevated hindquarters. But his legs sink down under the strain, and then every man within call has to be enlisted in the task of hauling him out with ropes. Such exertions, at an altitude whereat the mere task of breathing necessitates violent heart and lung action, frequently cause the bursting of a blood-vessel, and sometimes result, literally, in a broken heart.

After eight weary hours of continuous marching we reach the village of Khardung, an oasis delightful to the eye after the barrenness of the long valley leading away from the pass. The significance of these oases in the desert must be hard of comprehension for those who live in surroundings that are eternally green. Their charm and beauty lie in the contrast which they present to their environment, and the relief they afford to senses numbed by the glare from rock and sand. No degree of cold or altitude seems to detract from the power of the sun's rays, which beat upon one from above and are reflected into one's eyes by every stone and every grain of sand. Solar hats and coloured glasses are useful in protecting the eyes, but the fact remains that the body is absorbing the rays at a thousand points and undergoing a nervous process that amounts to mild paralysis. The sun in reasonable degree, as it is experienced in countries covered with vegetation, is an elixir of life, cleansing the blood and stimulating the faculties. But here those very qualities which make it desirable elsewhere operate

deleteriously on the human frame, because there is no intermediate absorbent, and because the traveller must endure the concentrated effect for far too long a period. Six or seven hours spent in such a glare as exists on a bright day in this wilderness literally reduces energy to the lowest point, and turns a human being into an uncomfortable mass of lassitude. Arrival at an oasis when in such a condition has an instantaneous effect, the sudden relief from the overpowering sun feeling like the falling away of a heavy burden.

The serai at Khardung is a big enclosure with a row of huts and stabling, behind which lies a small garden that irrigation has turned into a little paradise. The ground is covered with thick green grass, and spreading trees cast grateful shade. In one corner there is a wild-rose tree completely covered with wide open and brilliant carmine blossoms. In this restful haven my tent was pitched, the entrance under a willow-tree and fronting the blushing rosebush. Outside the serai lies a small cluster of curiously tumbled houses. To the uninitiated they would pass for a heap of stones, but when you know that the most desperate cold reigns here in winter, and that icy winds sweep the valley from end to end, you realise that these hidden dwellings are a triumph of snugness—in appearance. In reality a Ladakhi house is a chill and draughty dwelling, designed merely to keep off the wind, and not to keep out the cold. To defeat the temperature the people wear many layers of clothes, the innermost of which seldom see the light.

From Khardung we take ponies, and after an hour's march strike the valley of the Shyok river, the biggest of all the Ladakh streams, and the one which, many miles distant, joins the Indus, thereby conferring upon that river much of the importance which it enjoys. The valley of the Shyok is rather lower than that of the Indus at Leh, and it certainly boasts a milder climate,

for instead of the barren wastes of rock that skirt the latter, we find here a country almost covered with dense jungle. The valley averages rather more than two miles in width, and is commanded by mountains capped with eternal snow. From the snow flow innumerable torrents that streak the dark slopes with silver threads, each ornamenting a band of green vegetation engendered by the natural irrigation. Thus the valley of the Shyok presents an appearance much more picturesque than any other part of upper Ladakh. Indeed for scenery it would be hard to rival, for there is here combined the beauty of perpetual snow, the grandeur of towering precipices, and the charms of abundant vegetation. In the midst of the big flats covered with jungle, one every now and then enters upon a clearing where fields of the brightest emerald surround little white farm-houses embowered in trees. The road through the tiny village is probably shaded by trees, and romping burns and gurgling irrigation canals cross the way at twenty different points. The quantity of jungle has enabled each villager to surround his property with an impenetrable hedge of thorns, which not only protects the fields from the inroads of cattle and passers-by, but forms a barrier against the winter wind, and concentrates all the heat of summer upon the well-watered and fertile soil. Riding along the deep lanes formed by these hedges one catches glimpses of cottages surrounded by lawns of perfect grass, in which the babble of running water is never silent. The hedges are dotted with wild-rose trees, which in this lower altitude are now past their prime. But the masses of faded pink blossom and dim green leaves set in the brown of the thorn form a symphony in colour that completely contents one's æsthetic soul.

We now leave the Shyok to pursue its way through Baltistan, while we turn due north again, up the valley of the tributary Nubra, which rises in the glaciers that

surround the Saser Pass. The country in the lower reaches of this river is exactly the same as that of the Shyok, and our progress includes a series of delightful camps in shady gardens, surrounded by jungle that swarms with hare and chuckor, willing to jump into the pot at the sight of a gun. In one of the villages on the road there is a big gompa, regarding which I was able to obtain some interesting information, throwing light on the life and character of the people in this out-of-the-way part of the world.

One hundred years ago, it appears, a lama of peculiar sanctity gave up the ghost, to the deep regret of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. For a period of ten years his place in the gompa remained unfilled, none of the minor lamas being considered holy enough to occupy his shoes. But Lhasa now stepped into the breach with a letter indicating that the deceased saint had been re-incarnated, and that a child possessed by his spirit would be found in certain surroundings which were described in the letter. The lamas thereupon began to scour the countryside, and in due course they came across a tiny boy who fulfilled in all respects the requirements specified in the communication from Lhasa. The child grew to manhood, and took his place as abbot of the monastery, the fact of his being a re-incarnation of a local worthy adding greatly to his reputation. The new abbot proved to be a man of character, and the fame and credit of his monastery has spread over all Ladakh in these days. The third re-incarnation reigns at present, and maintains the traditions set by his former self, which impose regulations of the strictest upon the unfortunate, or perhaps one ought to say privileged, members of his institution.

Every night at sunset the abbot goes round the monastery and locks each monk into his cell, an apartment so small that the inmate cannot lie down, but must sleep in a sitting posture. Each individual is furnished

with a lamp and books, and he is expected to study the Scriptures until overcome by fatigue. And fatigue has a big say in the poor man's life, for he works all the day in the glebe belonging to the monastery, and enjoys but one meal throughout the twenty-four hours. The older and more senior men are exempt from manual labour, but all are busy from morning to night with their respective duties. The single meal of the day is partaken of at twelve o'clock. Meat is never touched, nor are any of the monks allowed to drink or smoke. A breach of these rules means instant expulsion. So far as I have been able to discover, the monks of this monastery are the only ones that systematically endeavour to do good amongst their people. A poor man can always count on assistance, and they are unremitting in their attentions to the sick. Two or three of the lamas have been trained as doctors, and their skill, not inconsiderable in the matter of simples, is always at the disposal of the ailing. They make no charge for attendance, and it is only those who are well able who make any recompense. The austerity of the lives of these lamas, and their devotion to the people, have resulted in the great popularity of the gompa, and voluntary subscriptions are frequent and liberal. So well recognised are the virtues of these good men that the Maharajah of Kashmir, a Hindu ruler, has entirely relieved them of revenue demand on the considerable area of land brought into cultivation by their industry, and has promised exemption for all ground which they may reclaim in the future.

Panamik is the last oasis on the Indian side, and there is 400 miles of marching to be done before cultivation is encountered again. The augmentation hereafter of the transport rates shows that the journey northward is no light matter to embark upon. Up to Panamik the Kashmir Government has settled that eight annas shall be the charge per animal per stage. At such a price it is pos-

sible to travel cheaply and comfortably, for half a dozen ponies will carry camping equipment and stores sufficient for two or three months. But beyond Panamik there is not an inhabitant until Chinese territory is reached. The principle of forced labour which prevails in Kashmir is that each village is bound to provide transport to the next, either for the traveller, the sportsman, or the merchant. In reality the labour is forced, but in effect the villager is well paid by the fixed rates, in addition to which the obligation is considered in the revenue settlement. It would, however, be quite beyond the intentions of the State Durbar to force the people of a village bordering on a huge desert to convoy travellers to the next point where transport was available. Indeed such a regulation would be tyrannical and unreasonable. So at Panamik the fixed transport rates disappear, and thereafter prices are regulated by supply and demand.

From Panamik to Shahidowla, the nearest Chinese post, the distance is about 180 miles, divided into twelve stages. Calculated according to the fixed rates this would represent a charge per animal of Rs. 6 for the journey to Shahidowla. But the present prevailing rate, from which there is never much deviation, is no less than Rs. 27 per pony. And when conditions are investigated, one cannot but admit that it is a reasonable charge. Every morsel of food for man and horse has to be carried, which alone adds about 30 per cent to the number of animals required to transport a given quantity of baggage. Then the journey is so severe that animals which accomplish it are completely knocked up, and must be rested for some weeks before doing further work. And, finally, the mortality amongst horses crossing the high passes and doing exhausting work in high altitudes is very great. Altogether, from Leh to Yarkand, it costs Rs. 65 to hire a transport animal, though it is possible to buy the same beast outright for Rs. 60 or even less.

Having reduced my baggage to a minimum, I find that four ponies will carry all that I need. These, plus riding nags for myself and each of two servants, make seven altogether; and I contract with a worthy body of Panamik to run my caravan to Shahidowla for Rs. 189. For this sum he provides two more animals to carry food and three men to look after the nine ponies, paying of course for the feed himself. The mounting of servants may seem an unnecessary extravagance, but as their ponies carry each man's bedding and food, an additional transport animal is saved. Besides which no personal servant will come unless mounted, for the marching alone is a good day's work.

From Panamik, 10,500 feet, to the foot of the Saser Pass is two days' march, including a climb of 6000 feet. It is a weary and laborious performance for man and horse, for much of the road is so steep that one must dismount, and the high altitude of the last camp does not make for compensating comfort. The crossing of the pass itself is one of the most disagreeable experiences that has ever come my way, and in recounting the hardships of the horses I am not exaggerating, but stating facts.

The camp below the Saser Pass affords an extraordinary view of glaciers flowing from the ravines of the stupendous mountains that surround it on all sides. The pass itself would be easy enough to negotiate were it not for the ice, for the approach is gradual and the top about four miles of level going. But this space is positively inundated with glaciers from the flanking mountains. North and south the amalgamated glaciers present huge cliffs of ice which cannot be climbed, and which offer an impenetrable barrier to advance in either direction. The three or four thousand animals which annually cross each way must therefore climb the hillsides until level with the ice, and then march across the glacier and

repeat the performance downward at the other side to reach the level of the valley beyond. There is absolutely no road on either side, with the result that horses are subjected to pain and cruelty that is almost on a par with vivisection.

In the course of the five miles or so which constitute the difficult part of the pass I counted the skeletons of no less than ninety animals, most of which had died within the previous few weeks. Below the pass on either side there must have been hundreds of skeletons, while whitened bones are almost as plentiful as stones. The annual mortality among horses, mules, camels, and yaks making the journey between Panamik and Shahidowla is said to be about two hundred, a great proportion of which may be attributed to exhaustion consequent on the difficulties of the Saser Pass, the rest of the road being comparatively easy.

The Saser is approached from the south by a road that in such a country may fairly be termed excellent. One ascent of 2000 to 3000 feet has been constructed up the face of a huge cliff, the amount of blasting and buttressing being prodigious, and the cost doubtless very heavy. This road continues practically up to the face of the great glacier occupying the pass, and there it ceases entirely. Henceforth the animals unhappily engaged on this journey must climb up the slope of a steep moraine composed of the usual rocky debris. The elevation is over 17,000 feet, and the angle probably 60 degrees. The distress from the inconceivably rough going and the heavy loads is pitiable to witness, and many a willing little horse breaks his heart endeavouring to keep pace with the others. Broken blood-vessels of course are common, and pools of blood a frequent sight. The moraine surmounted, there is then a section of the mountain-side to traverse. This is little better than the moraine, though not so steep. Then comes the

passage from *terra firma* to the glacier. Rocks of all sizes litter the line of contact, and for laden horses I cannot conceive of anything more difficult or cruel. On the morning I crossed there was a merchant's caravan of about twenty animals immediately in front of my own, and two of the ponies were stuck in the rocks. Their loads had been taken off, and the poor brutes struggled fiercely for freedom. One got clear, his legs being cut in the most shocking manner. The other broke his back, and was left to the wolves and ravens, the latter of whom, huge and horrible creatures, take the place of the vulture in these regions. From these rocks up the steep side of the glacier was a task which many animals failed to accomplish. Several slipped and fell, and with their loads rolled down upon the rocks below. One was killed. Others had to be unloaded and hauled up the treacherous surface. Some were escorted by half a dozen men pushing and straining upon ropes. While my ponies were waiting their turn I got out an axe and after half an hour's work cut a series of steps up the slope, which enabled my small convoy to get up without accident. My efforts met with little sympathy, and my own followers seemed incapable of understanding what was required. When the steps were made I ordered them to gather sand and sprinkle the path. The men in actual charge of the horses were most reluctant to undertake this small exertion, and it must be acknowledged that the people themselves might save their horses much suffering if they possessed any sense and energy.

Across the glacier was another and less avoidable strain upon the unfortunate horses. Blood crimsoned the track at every step, the result of fetlocks cut in the rocks below. All my ponies were bleeding in some part of the legs; one had the skin of the pastern severed from the top of the coronet, presenting a gash

horrible in appearance and doubtless extremely painful. One broke a blood-vessel. Though we had started at break of day so as to cross the glacier when the surface was hard after the night's frost, the going was fearfully rough, and the horses plunged in a manner that was agonising to watch. My animals were comparatively lightly laden and perhaps better fed, but those of the merchant in front went through a terrible ordeal. For nine days they will get to eat no more, perhaps less, than two pounds of barley per day and practically no grass, for what they can pick up on the road is hardly worth considering. I am positive that the strain of crossing the Saser must have done permanent harm to several, and that low feeding combined with continued exertion can have had no other result than heavy mortality.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LIVING GLACIER.

A GLACIER is a wonderful and terrible manifestation of the processes of nature. Every schoolboy knows what a glacier is, how it is generated, and why it fills a valley from side to side as readily as if it were water. But it is not everybody who has walked across one of these strange monsters, studied its idiosyncrasies, and endeavoured to comprehend its individuality. Doubtless the Bullock Workmans, the Freshfields, and others know all there is to know about glaciers, but to my mind these great travellers have merely described the body of the glacier and taken no account of its soul. And who that has spent hours on one of these ponderous moving things, listening to the cracking of its joints and to the heavy sighs that come from its depths, can deny that there is spirit as well as bulk in the leviathan of the mountains?

Near the Saser Pass there is a valley in which a hundred years past ran the road to Yarkand. But long ago a glacier came down from the hills and blocked the way, so that travellers must now take another route. The original glacier lies there still, filling the valley to a depth of many hundreds of feet and a mile or so in width. Anything more dirty or filthy could hardly be imagined. Its tail end is a big precipice of muddy grey, with two yawning caverns at the foot,

". . . a huge finger of ice has stretched downward from a mighty hollow among the mountain-tops"—see page 139.

from which torrents of ugly water pour out with a sullen roar. The surface is just like the bed of a river in a mountainous land, covered with stones, boulders, and rocks, ranging in size from a marble to a cathedral.

From a distance there is nothing to be seen but an irregular and rolling valley, differing little in appearance from the rocky slopes that bound it on either side. But as one approaches more closely it becomes evident that there is here more than has met the eye from a distance. In the middle of the old and weather-worn glacier there is a huge gash showing dirty grey slopes like those at the tail end. Evidently there is a hill in the middle of the valley, and the glacier in passing over the obstruction has broken its back. Then to one side there is a long white line that shines brightly in the sun. This traced to its source proves to be a young glacier that came into being long after the older one, and, flowing from a higher and smaller valley, has run along the surface of the original occupant in a narrow stream of ice that has not yet had time to get dirty. Then at another point a huge finger of ice has stretched downward from a mighty hollow among the mountain-tops and pierced the side of the old glacier at right angles, just as one ship might ram another. Altogether there are five smaller and younger glaciers pouring on to the parent one, and where the junctures are it is terrible to look.

After a fruitless morning after ibex, the shikari and myself devoted the forenoon to an exploration of the huge grey creature that lay in our path. No sooner had we left the solid hillside and stepped upon the chaos of tumbled stone than we were conscious of a difference. Everything was in a state of poise, and the rocks rattled from under our feet in dangerous fashion. Stepping warily, we slowly advanced over the broken surface, an alpenstock thrown point down springing back with a jerk that suggested life and elasticity under-

neath. As a rule we could see nothing but rocks under foot, but occasionally we came to places where black ice oozed up, and the stones were embedded in it like currants on the top of a pudding. Every now and then a bank of rubble would collapse and slide flat with a disconcerting rattle. At one spot there was a pale-green pool, and as I was looking at this patch of colour amid such unlovely surroundings, it began slowly to sink, and suddenly disappeared with a loud sough. A horrid bubbling and sucking came from a crack where the pool had been; then the stones all around slid into the hole and filled it up, so that it looked just like the rest of the ground we were walking upon. Avoiding the spot, we came to the place where the new glacier flowed over the old one. Where the side of the one touched the other there was a little river running in a channel of beautiful, pale-blue ice. The flowing water had played strange tricks with its surroundings, fantastic shapes showing where it had carved its way. Most curious it was to see a great rock, weighing many tons, upheld by a slender pedestal of ice. Similar monuments filled the bed of the stream, and one collapsed while I leant upon it, the rock fortunately falling away from me. On one with a good solid support I made the shikari climb, that he might be photographed in so unique a position.

Then by dint of cutting steps we reached the place where the big finger came down and poked into the ribs of the old glacier. It was a horrid sight, for the face of the smaller glacier was all cracked and wrinkled, and huge splinters looked desperately like tumbling upon our heads. Underneath our feet was a loud murmur that betokened a sub-glacial stream, but which sounded more like a muffled roar of pain. The huge fissures in the old glacier and the bruised appearance of its side suggested suffering. From the meeting-point we hurried away, for where two glaciers argue for the road is no place for a

A rock weighing many tons upheld by a pedestal of ice—see page 140.

A Peak in Zanskar.

"*A small lake of most exquisite colour and proportions*"—*note the stone hanging on the brink of the precipice*,—see page 141.

Showing the splash made by the stone, which was pushed over by the Shikari.

human being to linger. Retracing our steps, we crossed the glacier lower down and hit upon a small lake of most exquisite colour and proportions.

It was perhaps forty yards long and twenty wide. One side was a precipice of pure green ice, with an outward slope and a low hollow gallery close to the water. Continual dripping showed that the ice-wall was slowly melting, and the falling of stones and rocks from the debris on top occurred every now and then. The opposite side of the little lake was a slope of perhaps 30 degrees, covered with huge rocks. On one of the latter I took my place to see what happened, for there was a big stone on the very brink of the opposite precipice, waiting to lose its balance when a little more of the ice had melted. While watching, a slide occurred on my own side and gave us warning that a wetting was the possible price of overlooking the domestic affairs of this old glacier. The slide began with a small stream of sand, followed by stones, and then by a rock that cannot have weighed less than twenty tons. This monster began slowly with a grating sound, that, as his pace increased, grew into a deep roar. The end was a plunge into the water that sent waves dashing backward and forward in fierce tumult. While the rock was sliding an electrical tremor ran through the ice, and when it dashed upon level ground below the water the whole glacier jumped from the shock. Immediately the agitation of the water began to subside little caverns and fissures all round the lake began to belch air with a loud bubbling noise. This continued for nearly five minutes, and I wondered if it was the prelude to another complete disappearance of the water, such as I had witnessed an hour before. Thinking that if such a thing occurred on such a scale the consequences might be serious, I proposed to accelerate the progress of the stone hanging on the brink of the opposite side, and then to return to dry

land. The shikari went round with my alpenstock to give it a push. He gave the push and nearly slid in after the stone, a fortunately timed photograph showing the ensuing splash and the alacrity with which the wise man darted backward. Having tempted Providence sufficiently for one morning we then retired as quickly as possible, and I am no judge of *diablerie* if the glacier did not sigh like a disappointed fiend when we stepped safely ashore.

Glaciers are sinister brutes, and sometimes they display an intelligence in their designs against humanity that is positively Satanic. The cataclysms for which they are responsible in this part of the world are comparatively common, and when they occur the destruction to life and property is lamentable. These catastrophes happen without the world knowing much about them, probably because they occur in remote regions out of touch with civilisation. But the cataclysm of the Indus which took place in 1841 had far-reaching effects, and is remembered in India to this day. Not among Europeans, however, for at that time the Punjab was not under our rule, and contemporary chronicles merely record its occurrence. Major Cunningham, in his book on Ladakh, published shortly afterwards, describes this cataclysm, and in travelling through the country where it took place I have been able to confirm his version in many respects. The glacier which caused the trouble still exists, and I saw it when crossing the upper Shyok river at a distance of about five miles. Unfortunately I was unable to visit the upper side owing to the state of the water.

Near its source the Shyok river is spanned by enormous glaciers that slide down from the adjacent mountains and thrust their snouts across the gorge of the river. The usual causes combine to disintegrate the ice, and it is believed that during the autumn of 1840 one of those natural bridges over the Shyok collapsed and partially

blocked the flow of the river. In December and January 1840-41 it was observed at Attock that the Indus was unusually low, and that in February and March it was even fordable. Although melted snow in April and May increased the volume of water, there was still so marked a decrease in the usual quantity that it was assumed something was happening in the upper reaches. And, indeed, 800 miles upstream there was in preparation a cataclysm of terrible and unprecedented proportions. The lake which formed on the upper side of the collapsed glacier has been traced and found to measure 12 miles in length and half a mile in breadth, with a depth of 400 feet close to the obstruction. Altogether it has been calculated that about 23,000,000,000 cubic feet of water was gathered behind the glacial barrier, ready to be precipitated into the practically empty bed of the river.

In June the catastrophe occurred. A tremendous wave swept down the valley of the Shyok with irresistible force, followed the bed of that stream for 300 miles, when it plunged into the Indus and continued its progress for another 500 miles to Torbeela, close to the plains of India. Having fallen 14,000 feet during a race that had lasted over two days, the wave continued its way with unabated force and swept past Attock in a wall of thick muddy water 30 feet high, submerging the fort of Khairabad, and thereafter coursing with overwhelming strength through the Punjab and Sind to the sea, a further distance of 900 miles, or 1750 miles altogether. For several hundreds of miles every village in its upper course was destroyed, every acre of cultivated land licked up, every tree torn up by the roots, while human beings and cattle were immolated by the thousand. Five hundred men of a large army encamped near Torbeela were drowned, and the whole camp and equipment destroyed. The devastation between Tor-

beela and Attock was so great that a historian of those days wrote that "it will take hundreds, if not thousands, of years to enable time to repair the mischief of that terrible hour." In the plains of the Punjab and Sind damage was tremendous, both to life and property.

The same sort of thing on a small scale is continually occurring in this country of glaciers, but people seem more wary nowadays, both in regard to themselves and their property. Occasionally a landslide has similar consequences, and the cataclysm of the Sutlej, which took place over a century ago, is worthy of description. At a point on the river not far from Simla, where the banks consist of precipices rising several thousands of feet, the shoulder of a vast mountain suddenly gave way and slid into the gorge. The flow of the river was completely blocked, and a lake began to form on the upper side of the obstruction. Below, the river-bed became quite dry, with the exception of pools here and there. For forty days the water accumulated, affecting the stream for a distance of twenty miles along its upper course, and rising to a height of 400 feet at the point dammed. It has been estimated that no less than 19,000,000,000 cubic feet of water was pent up, when percolation and pressure had so weakened the obstruction that it gave way and released the imprisoned river. A wave, varying between 50 and 100 feet high, then rushed headlong down the river-bed, carrying everything before it. Numerous villages were swept to destruction, and the greater part of the populous town of Bilaspur was devastated. The wave continued its progress for over a hundred miles, when it debouched from the hills and entered the plains near the town of Rupar. Here it cannoned against the low range of the Sewaliks, left the bed of the river, and careered across country towards a tributary of the Beas. Following the bed of this stream, the wave roared

along for another 150 miles, when it plunged into the bed of the Beas itself and was broken on the high cliffs that form the right bank of that river. So deep was the trench formed by the wave that the river soon after left its old bed, and to this day follows the course of the flood. Records of the damage done in the plains are not available, but in the hills the cataclysm was anxiously awaited, and the bursting of the barrier was signalled by the firing of rifles, which warned the inhabitants of the approaching danger. Immense loss of property took place, but few lives were lost, says Cunningham.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KARAKORAM PASS.

THE ordeal of the Saser Pass accomplished, there is the Shyok river to be crossed again. Nearly a week earlier we had passed it by means of a handsome bridge at a height of 10,000 feet. Now, at a point 150 miles nearer its source, and at an altitude of 15,000 feet, the Shyok again confronted us, in a truculent manner characteristic of its glacial origin. At the upper end of the enormous loop which the river forms it flows in a gravelly bed about half a mile wide. Of this breadth the stream occupies about half, running in three or four separate currents divided by low banks level with the top of the water. Owing to the melting snow it is unfordable except in the morning, when the night's frost restricts the volume of water. The Kashmir Government used to keep two large ferry-boats for the transport of horses and their loads, but in one of the periodic floods these boats were torn from the moorings, swept downstream, and smashed to pieces. Now three men remain who watch the state of the river and advise travellers when and how to negotiate the ford.

We were warned that the crossing must take place between eight and ten in the morning, and at that time my small caravan and another hundred animals carrying merchandise were assembled on the bank of the river. One of the three men was wading hither and thither,

naked to the waist, searching for a passage, and he duly returned and reported that we must wait. The unfortunate creature had been nearly an hour in the icy water, and when he came back he was shivering in pitiable fashion. A surer way of catching one's death of cold I cannot imagine. Then a merchant went out a little way to prospect, and came back in a great hurry, or rather his pony did, for the river was full of lumps of ice racing along almost completely under the water. These small icebergs weighed from fifty to one hundred and fifty pounds, and as they were travelling at anything from five to fifteen miles an hour, no horse could stand their bumping. In fact horses' legs have been broken by them, and so the hundred nags were off-loaded to wait a more favourable moment. I tried to get my men to make a dash for it, but they would not budge.

After three hours' delay the river began to rise, and it was a case of now or never. I persuaded my fellows to have a try, and I gave them a lead, one of the waders going in front to show the way. In the very first current, with the water up to my pony's belly, a lump of ice struck him square on the hocks, and he nearly jumped out of his skin. Fortunately we were close to one of the shallows, and for this the little brute made a dart. If I hadn't been frozen to the saddle by the cold I must have fallen off, but the feel of that water round my legs put the rest of my body in such a funk that I was physically incapable of letting go. It was impossible to cross at right angles owing to the depth and force of the water, and because of the ice. We therefore went down with the stream, edging across when opportunity offered, and returning upstream along the intermediate banks. The crossing occupied about an hour, and at the end of it I had to take off my boots to see if my feet were alive. The poor creatures who had done it on foot, stripped to

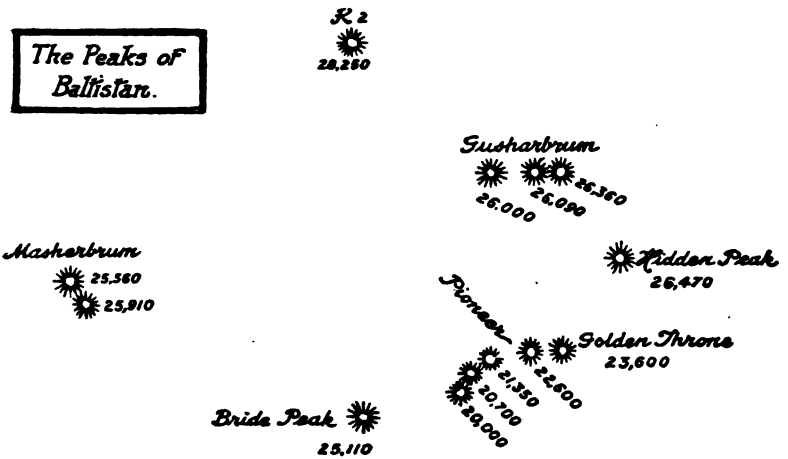
the waist, were grey with cold, and it was quite affecting to see them pinching themselves to see if their legs were really their own. They all sat down in the sun for a little time. Whether they hoped to get warm in that way, or because they were afraid of their legs dropping off if they walked, I have never been able to determine. We were all safe, however, both in body and spirit, the latter proved by the energy with which my party jeered at the pusillanimous merchants on the other side, who still refused to venture. My followers, however, be it remembered, were only risking my baggage, but the merchants had valuable property which they did not want swept down to Karachi. My sympathy was certainly with the merchants, who remained upon the opposite bank, high—and dry.

We were not yet clear of water. The road now left the Shyok and ran up a narrow gully in the mountains, through which flowed a small tributary of the main river. This gully was nothing but a deep chasm with tremendous precipices on either hand. The torrent rushing down just cannoned backward and forward from side to side, and as there was no road but the bed of the stream we had to do likewise. We were four hours in that river-bed, and it is no exaggeration to say that we crossed the water at least one hundred and fifty times. It was usually 30 feet wide, and deep enough to touch the pony's belly and keep one's feet below zero. Eventually we got out of this horribly uncomfortable ravine, and camped for the night at 15,100 feet, at a place where I shot five big hares.

For a day or two we wandered along river-beds that filled narrow ravines so that banks to walk upon were non-existent. It was trying work crossing and recrossing the icy streams that meandered athwart the track, but there was no avoiding them, and no chance of evading wet feet, which in this country are synonymous with

frozen feet. From the second passage of the Shyok we steadily ascended towards the Depsang Plain, a great tableland 17,000 feet high, and commanding a marvellous view for over a hundred miles to the east and west. The mountains of Chanchenmo and Lingzi Than in the east showed the line of the Thibetan border, and in the west soared the famous peaks of Baltistan.

The latter are little known, for comparatively few Europeans have ever seen them. A beautiful and wonderful sight, they are distant sixty or seventy miles from



Depsang, from whence they appear to be tightly packed in a group, shoulder overlapping shoulder. In reality they lie almost in a circle, of which the diameter is no more than twenty miles. K2 is higher than Kinchinjunga, and is the second highest mountain in the world. Lacking the massive bulk of the other, it gains in elegance by reason of its slender tapering peak. The group does not present so magnificent a barrier of ice and snow as that seen from Darjeeling, but the spire-like tops soaring sharply above the edge of the dull tableland of Depsang have a grace and beauty not less impressive than is afforded by

the Snowy Mountains of the Eastern Himalayas. But how can one judge between these marvels of nature, each of which is a law unto itself and a thing beyond human criticism? Here I cannot refrain from mentioning that within a space of five months I have gazed upon the three highest mountains known to humanity, an opportunity which perhaps has never yet fallen to mere man.

Such things are not to be seen lightly, nor would one wish that the toil and trouble could have been abated. The memory of these wonders of the earth is a priceless possession, none the less precious because one has waited and endured somewhat to obtain it. A lasting regret there is—that one has seen these things and must remain for ever inarticulate. It is one thing to see a pale white shape faintly gleaming against the blue sky, and quite another thing to express the grip it takes of the heart and the imagination. A stony colourless plain and, far beyond, a dim shaft of light like a broken spear projecting above the horizon. Yet how much is suggested—a vast bulk hidden from view, long miles of snow-clad slopes, immeasurable cubic yards of green ice; the covering the accumulation of centuries, the thing itself a monument to some convulsion of nature dating back into ages beyond comprehension. A thing of perfect serenity, looking down upon the world with placid calm; yet one knows how the wind rages among its pinnacles, and how the storms of winter howl like wild beasts in its ravines. The mother of rivers that nourish millions of humanity, the progenitor of floods that wipe out human endeavour as if it were writing on a slate. A jewel in the sunlight, and a terror in the darkness. Its head poised in the uttermost limits of the air we breathe, its feet in the bowels of the earth, where are generated the catastrophes that shake the world.

A strange place is Depsang Plain. The tops of a hundred mountains that befringe it give an impression

of loftiness, a feeling that one is looking down upon the rest of the world. There is no vestige of vegetation up here; nothing but gravel in long low smooth sweeps meets the eye. A few small lakes of deepest ultramarine float mirage-like in the hollows, and at their edges disport lonely dabchicks. Death is manifest in the hundreds of skeletons that make white patches upon the all-pervading drab. What a record of animal suffering do these whitening bones indicate! And here we encounter vultures for the first time, huge loathsome creatures, that waddle fearfully away from their prey when they hear the crunch of horses' feet. They are too gorged to fly, and their very helplessness makes them the more timid. A dead horse lying in an attitude of utter exhaustion, this foul bird with hooked beak and talons, tell of horror and tragedy even in this remote spot, surrounded by all that is most beautiful and grand among the greater works of nature.

From Depsang the track drops a few hundred feet, and we make a long and laborious journey up a river-bed. The stream which meanders along it is insignificant in size, and is merely a tributary of the greater Shyok which it joins down below. But this little river rises in the watershed that divides India from Central Asia. Within 100 yards of its source the beginnings of the great Yarkand river emerge from the rocks, the one forming part of the mighty Indus that discharges into the sea after a journey of 2000 miles, the other flowing north and emptying its waters into the capacious maw of the Tarim desert. From this river-bed to the top of the Karakoram Pass there is an ascent of about 1500 feet.

On the flat my little horse breathed heavily, and every now and then stopped to ease the thumping that threatened to rend his chest. To ask him to carry me up the approach to the great pass seemed gratuitous cruelty,

and so I slid off his back and began slowly and heavily to climb. The gradient is well arranged, and might be overcome with little exertion were it not for the uncanny rarity of the air. One breathes half a dozen times to find that on a sudden one must gulp or gasp like a person in a fit to satisfy the accumulated craving for air. The violence of the effort sets the heart panting like a sledge-hammer, and the person who at that moment refuses to take warning runs the risk of internal rupture—and perhaps death. Human beings are sensible enough to know when to take an easy, but the unfortunate horse, heavily laden, obeys the behest of his master until the vital clockwork breaks—hence the skeletons that lie in every direction. The Karakoram Pass is the highest in the world which serves the purpose of an avenue of trade between two great regions. In the Himalayas there are higher passes, but they are seldom used, and only on special occasions. And having tried 18,550 feet, one is content never to want to go higher than the Karakoram.

What place in the world is without its record of human crime and tragedy? Even up here among the clouds the devil in mankind gets loose and stultifies the claim we make to the possession of a soul, and to superiority over the merely animal. In 1888 a murder was committed in the Karakoram Pass, and just below the actual crossing stands a heap of stones to mark the occurrence. On the top of the heap there used to rest a handsome white marble slab engraved with the particulars, but the marble is now broken to pieces, and the once orderly pile reduced to a scattered heap. The story is doubtless known to people who have lived long in India, but for the younger generation perhaps it may have interest, for it involves a mystery which has never been fathomed. An exhaustive inquiry was made at the time by the British authorities in Kashmir, and the guilt fixed and ultimately punished. But so far as I have been able to discover, no motive for

the crime has ever been assigned, and the reason of it remains unexplained to this day. One of my servants is a man called Kallick, who has served many distinguished travellers, among them Bower, Younghusband, Sven Hedin, Wellby, &c., and he remembers the affair distinctly. From him I obtained the following narrative, which I believe is substantially correct, though possibly not altogether accurate as to details.

Concerned in the affair were a young Scotsman named Dalgleish, and a Kabuli called Dad Mahomed Khan. Dalgleish was well known, having accompanied Carey, of the Bombay Civil Service, upon one of the boldest and most laborious exploring expeditions ever undertaken in Thibet and Central Asia. The Pathan was a rather notorious trader between Yarkand and Ladakh. Dalgleish, both before and after his adventures with Carey, had traded to Yarkand, and knew Dad Mahomed well, and appeared to have entertained considerable friendship for him. But during Dalgleish's absence in Thibet Dad Mahomed had had bad luck, losing all his ponies in a storm when conducting a caravan of merchandise between Central Asia and Kashmir. To carry on his business he had recourse to Hindu money-lenders. Matters did not prosper with him, however, and in time he was pressed for repayment of the borrowed money. Being unable to settle, he was called up before the British Joint Commissioner at Leh, who notified him that until he paid his debts he would not be allowed to trade upon the Yarkand-Leh road.

For two or three years Dad Mahomed lived idly at Leh, when Dalgleish returned from his travels and prepared to resume his trading ventures to Central Asia. He invited Dad Mahomed to accompany him, and applied to the authorities to have the injunction against his Pathan friend rescinded. Permission not being forthcoming, Dalgleish marched north with a small caravan,

but halted on the way, and wrote back to Dad Mahomed to follow him. This Dad Mahomed did, with or without permission Kallick could not say. He joined Dalgleish at Tankse, and the pair proceeded as far as the Karakoram Pass in the utmost amity. Dalgleish had given Dad Mahomed a tent, a horse to ride, and had generally instructed his servants to treat him as they did himself.

Camped immediately to the north of the Karakoram Pass one day, Dad Mahomed was having tea in Dalgleish's tent. The two were observed to walk out together, Dalgleish's rifle being carried by Dad Mahomed. Shortly afterwards a shot was heard, nothing remarkable, as shikar was abundant on the road. But immediately afterwards Dad Mahomed rushed up to the servants' tent and said that he had shot the Sahib. The servants ran to the spot where their master lay, Dad Mahomed meantime providing himself with a tulwar from his own tent. With this weapon he returned to Dalgleish, who was only wounded in the shoulder, and warning the servants off, he proceeded to hack at the stricken man until he had murdered him. Being armed, he then drove the servants back to their tent, and warned them at their peril not to leave it.

Dad Mahomed now occupied Dalgleish's tent, remaining awake throughout the night for fear of reprisals from the servants. In the morning he ordered the horses to be loaded and the caravan to proceed on its journey north, he himself riding Dalgleish's horse. Arrived at the next stage they encamped, Dad Mahomed telling the servants they could do what they liked with the merchandise and go where they liked. He rode off on Dalgleish's horse, the only thing he took, though a large sum in notes was eventually found in the dead man's baggage. The servants returned with the baggage to the Karakoram Pass, picked up Dalgleish's body, and returned to Leh. In due course Dad Mahomed was found

guilty of murder, and a large reward offered for his apprehension. No motive for the crime was discovered, robbery not being the object apparently, because nothing belonging to Dalgleish was touched except the horse upon which the murderer rode away.

There now followed an interesting chase, and as the facts were related to me by the chief participator, Colonel Bower, their accuracy can be relied upon. Bower at the time was shooting in the Pamirs, and shortly afterwards left the mountains to visit Kashgar. There he received a letter from the Indian Government stating the facts, and instructing him to arrest Dad Mahomed at all costs, and bring him back to India for trial. The story was well known in Kashgar, for Dad Mahomed had come straight to the town and boasted of his deed. The Chinese took no interest in the affair, but the Russians had been eager to arrest him, and would have done so if he had set foot in the Consulate grounds. It appears that Dad Mahomed frequently walked past the sentries jeering, but carefully avoiding Russian soil.

It was necessary that Bower's mission should be kept secret, else there would be no hope of catching the culprit, who had left Kashgar in an easterly direction some weeks before the arrival of the instructions from India. Bower wrote to India to say that there could be small prospect of success, seeing that practically the whole of Asia was open to the fugitive. However, he took the best possible means to run his man to earth, and, in consultation with a Hindu merchant who cherished a deadly hatred of Dad Mahomed, sent emissaries along the principal routes to make inquiry. These had to proceed carefully, lest their purpose became known. In case they got on the trail, they were furnished with letters declaring who they were and what their object was. These letters, of course, were not to be used except in extremity.

The two men sent into Afghanistan had a curious adventure. They were arrested in Balkh, where they gave out that they were doctors searching for particular plants. The Amir, Abdur Rahman, was in Mazar-i-Sharif at the time, and the men petitioned to be allowed to go before him. This being conceded, they handed Bower's letter to the Amir, who read it through, and confirmed the statements of the prisoners. Those plants, however, he said to the men, were not to be found in Afghanistan, but he recommended them to try Bokara, where he had heard they grew. The men were then released, and given presents of money and clothes.

Meanwhile Bower himself marched east in the direction Dad Mahomed was supposed to have gone. Near Aksu a man came into camp and asked what was the nationality of the Sahib. On being told that Bower came from India, he expressed astonishment, for he had thought people from India were black. He then volunteered the information that in the neighbourhood was another foreigner, whose nationality nobody could determine. He was a tall man, and something like the Sahib. This man had come nobody knew where from, and lived in the jungle, where he earned money by cutting wood. Bower felt very little doubt that this was his man, and immediately made preparations for catching him. But on reaching the place the bird was flown. The presence of an Englishman from India was quite enough for Dad Mahomed, if it really were he. It was while marching in this neighbourhood that Bower obtained the famous manuscripts connected with his name.

Many months had now passed with no tidings, and Bower had begun to think it was a hopeless business when news came from Samarcand that Dad Mahomed had been caught and lodged in a Russian prison. The two men sent in this direction had wandered west through the towns of Turkestan until one day, when walking in

the bazaar of Samarcand, they saw Dad Mahomed sitting on a box. The man who recognised him stopped and entered into conversation, while the other ran off to the Governor. This personage was no less than the great Kuropatkin, who, on being given Bower's letter, at once sent a squad of Cossacks to the bazaar and effected the arrest.

On being advised, Bower made all the arrangements for extradition, and had sent to India for an armed escort to take Dad Mahomed over at the Russian border. He and his followers were much rejoiced at the prospect of marching the culprit back to India and seeing justice done. There was, besides, the Government reward of Rs.5000 to be divided amongst the parties sent in pursuit. Great, then, was the disappointment when word came from the Russians that Dad Mahomed had hung himself in his cell, and cheated the avenger. The story of the crime, however, and the unrelenting manner in which the Indian Government hunted the criminal, became known throughout Central Asia, and greatly increased the prestige of the Sirkar. In the tiny cemetery reserved for Europeans at Leh, Dalgleish was buried, the Indian Government placing a handsome stone over the grave, and making an annual allowance for its upkeep.

and if we decide to send an army I decline to take any responsibility, for I have much reason to believe that Kallick is possessed of great cunning, in addition to intelligence, and that he would not stick at a trifle when endeavouring with a story to propitiate his master for a bad dinner. Without exception he is the worst cook in Asia, and the consciousness of it is surely apparent in his photograph.

Near the Karakoram Pass, for the first time I caught sight of the famous Thibetan antelope, or *Pantholops Hodgsonii*. This timid creature is one of the hardest to shoot, owing to his haunts being limited to the high plains of Thibet and Ladakh. During my recent journey in Southern Thibet we all looked out for him without success, and we were told his habitat was far to the north of Lhasa. Right through Ladakh I was on the watch, and it was only to the north of Depsang Plain, and when actually ascending the Karakoram, that we encountered an antelope that corresponded with the descriptions I had read. On the southern side of the Karakoram I saw thirteen females and ten young ones, but no males, and as Kinloch states that the females have short horns, I was greatly puzzled, for the females I saw had no horns. Nor was there any possibility of mistake, for I watched all I saw most carefully with powerful glasses.

Not until we crossed the pass did I see a male, and then there was no mistaking the horns. The females on the southern side of the pass were all alone with their young, but on the northern side they ran in herds of about a dozen all told, extraordinarily tame if one went by without taking any notice. They never let us nearer than 100 yards, and if we stopped to look at them they would bolt from 400 yards. It was a pretty sight to see the little ones race alongside their mothers, and the pace that the apparently new-born can travel is

astonishing. Of hundreds that I eventually saw, no females had horns, and there is no doubt Kinloch must be wrong in this particular. I spent many hours trying to get within range of the few single bucks I saw, but they are quite as timid as gazelle, and generally bolted at long distances. The height was over 17,000 feet, and it was no joke climbing among the low hills and over broken ground in such attenuated air. So when I got within 200 yards of a beast with fairly good horns, I was delighted to bag him and rest from further labour, for he was quite the best I had seen. No amount of measurement would make the horns more than 23¾ inches, but as they rarely go much longer perhaps I ought to be satisfied. Kallick, who has often been with Sahibs in Chanchenmo, said that a shikari Sahib would be very *khush* with such a head. My beast weighed a good hundred pounds, and made splendid eating. I should say that he was considerably bigger than the average black buck. My shot got him just behind the heart, and the expanding bullet tore most of his inside out, the photograph showing him in a paralysed condition exactly as he lay down on being struck.

I spent the whole of the next day trying to get a better head. I got within distant range several times, but the horns were all obviously smaller than the ones I already had. One beast looked as if his were bigger, or at any rate as big, and I followed him for five miles over the hills, until well above the Karakoram Pass, to a height that cannot have been less than 19,000 feet, and the brute never let me get nearer than 400 yards. It was a most fatiguing day, and I never fired a shot. Yet the labour was not without reward, for through the glasses I was able to see something of the habits of the creature I was hunting. In Chanchenmo antelope are said to hunt in large herds of buck alone, sixty and seventy being a not uncommon number. Here I saw

hundreds of females, mostly in lots of three and four, but occasionally as many as a dozen. But of the dozen or so of bucks that I saw throughout two days' close observation, there never were two together. From which I deduce that these single animals were denied admission to the herds of males, which evidently make Chanchenmo their home at this time of the year, for some particular reason. One male that I spotted on a distant ridge suddenly turned and ran towards me for no apparent reason. It was well on in the morning, and presumably he had done all the feeding he wanted. He came a good mile at a rattling pace, over a series of spurs and nullahs. In one of the latter he stopped and started kicking up a great dust with his hind feet, and when he had dug a hole he lay down in it, body concealed but back and horns easily to be seen. Several times he got up and repeated the digging, until he made a hole that satisfied him. I imagine the object of his galloping before lying down was to defeat any enemy which might have been stalking him while he fed. Females, I might remark, seem to feed all day, probably on account of their young, whereas the males confine their eating to the early morning and the evening. One curious feature of the male antelope is that on either side of the groin there is a hole which appears to penetrate far into the body. It has the appearance of a slit that is generally closed, and in that position measures about an inch. The Kirghiz say that by means of these holes he fills himself with wind when running, and thereby goes much faster. Kallick says that though he has seen many antelope killed, he never observed these holes before, nor did any of his Sahibs appear to know about them.

Dropping from the Karakoram Pass, we found ourselves in a country of rather a new kind. The height was very great, probably 17,000 feet, and the adjacent hills low and rolling. Ancient lake-beds were every-

where, and marks of ice abundant. In the wide open valley of the Yarkand river we saw several *shummals*, or whirlwinds. On the ground there was the usual turmoil, but above, rising for probably 1000 feet, was a perfect funnel of uniform thickness that travelled slowly along, gently swaying as if an independent wind were affecting it. Above was a small cloud of no very terrible appearance. The day was perfectly still, and these strange manifestations in the silence were as startling as they were graceful. They came and went quite suddenly, like ghosts, leaving no sign behind them. While we were halted one came suddenly upon the camp, and startled us by the unexpected tumult. Everything flapped madly for a moment, and then we were smothered in dust and sand. Nobody saw anything coming, and I am certain nothing went. But my servants all knew it was a *shummal*. Kallick said so, and hinted that it was the spirit of the antelope that I had shot the day before. No harm was done to the camp, but it may be worth mentioning that the pull-through belonging to my rifle went missing that day, and that six men searching for an hour could not find it. But the antelope is a gentle creature, and doubtless the ghost of one would be content with just such a mild remonstrance.

A few days after the Karakoram comes the Suget Pass, marked 18,170 feet on my map, though I have seen it given as 17,600 elsewhere. The southern side is easily approached, for the rise cannot be more than a couple of thousand feet spread over a whole day's march. The rarity of the air caused the horses a good deal of distress, but the whole secret of negotiating great heights lies in taking them easily. From a sudden strain upon the organs such as a steep ascent entails, it is difficult to recover without abundance of ozone. But if men and horses are never hustled, I have no hesitation in saying that very high altitudes may be attained without marked

discomfort—always providing that due deliberation is observed in their approach. Anybody coming straight from the plains to 18,000 feet would die immediately, I believe, however strongly constituted. But gradually working up from the plains to Srinagar, and then to Ladakh, gives the opportunity and time for acclimatisation. The northern side of the Suget Pass is covered with a big patch of snow, and the descent is very steep, though much modified by an extensive series of zigzags. A few miles below the pass we encountered patches of grass, which were most welcome on account of the horses.

The road down from Suget Pass is too terrible for words. It all lies either in the bed of the river that rises in the pass, or among piles of detritus. The whole valley is one vast moraine. There is not a shadow of attempt at a road, and such a track as has been made by continuous traffic is usually not worth travelling upon. Most caravans strike out their own path. It is perfectly passable, but continual stepping over stones is horrible marching for tired and heavily laden animals. The descent is also very steep from the top of the pass to Kurgan, which entirely supplanted the Shahidowla of my imagination, being about 7000 feet in some ten miles. Kurgan was our first encounter with Chinese jurisdiction, and here I parted with my Panamik transport and began dealings with the Kirghiz.

Kurgan is a fortified place within the meaning of the act, but of precious little military significance from a modern point of view. The Suget nullah debouches at right angles upon the valley of the Karakash, and at the point of junction lies the fort, commanding the valley on either hand and the entrance to the nullah. As the nullah is one vast moraine of huge rocks, it would be quite easy to skirmish up to the walls of the fort, and once there Heaven help the defenders! Fifteen feet of rubble wall, two or three feet thick, surmounted by a

thin mud parapet, would go down at the first discharge of a mountain-gun, while the upper parapet would afford no protection to riflemen. But this construction of course was never meant for defence, but merely as a demonstration of the power of the Emperor of Heaven in the eyes of his innocent subjects, the Kirghiz.

A Mirza received me with due humility, and his pack of myrmidons scurried hither and thither making the small mud cabin which was to be my temporary residence as habitable as may be. A Mirza is a person who sends a written report, so I am told. In the present instance he was an individual of Yarkandi parentage, permitted to sell supplies to traders, and whose duty was to report to the nearest Chinese official upon arrivals at his station. A Sahib is a rare bird in these parts, and the whole countryside mobilised to look at him. There is just the fort and no other houses. But a Kirghiz encampment in the adjacent hills furnishes a few loiterers, who, with the dozen chaprassies who are the garrison of the fort, make up quite a respectable crowd. Before this assemblage I solemnly produced my Peking passport, a truculent document that threatened impalement and disembowelment against all and sundry in Chinese employment who do not guard, cherish, and comfort Fil-a-sher Sahib, the well-beloved and trusty friend of the Lord's Anointed who sitteth in the Blue Above—or words to that effect. But the thunder of Peking struck no terror to the heart of the Mirza, for he could read no word of Chinese. He recognised the words Kashgar and Peking, however, and therefrom concluded I was a person entitled to travel in the country, and from whom loot might fairly be extracted.

To his assistance he called in the local Beg, a Chinese institution personified in the chief of the Kirghiz tribe roaming the neighbouring hills. In his person are represented law and order, and the divine right to skin the

helpless. Kallick, in conjunction with these robbers, hatched a plot whereby I was to pay Rs. 20 per load to Sanju, about six stages ahead. They swore various merchants with whom I had made friends to support this magnification of the legitimate rate, and afterwards they were to cut up the spoil. Ignorant of the arrangement, I called up the Beg to discuss the question of further transport. It was a case of camels, yaks, and horses at various stages of the journey, and the Beg said it would cost me Rs. 25 arranged through to Sanju. He evidently anticipated a protest, but I took the wind out of all their sails by declaring that Rs. 16 was quite enough, and that I would pay no more. It must have been a great blow to Kallick, who moved like a man in neuralgia for the rest of the day. But a certain Pathan, who had gone shikaring with me, and of whom more in another chapter, said, when I asked him about rates, that Rs. 12 would have been enough, and inadvertently let out about the plan to rob me. At the moment I bided my time, but rejoiced to think what might happen to the Beg when I reached the ear of a Chinese official who could read the passport.

Another determined attempt on my purse was made by Kallick, Mirza, and another member of the local talent, but owing to a good Scotch hold on the strings I was able to defeat it. I was known to possess sovereigns—coins which had excited much admiration when passed over to the Beg in payment of the transport arrangement. There was no question as to their relative value to the rupee, but when it came to the tenga, a silver coin current in Central Asia, it was deemed by the cabal in the kitchen that I could be but imperfectly informed. Now, a certain book in my possession happens to state that a tenga is worth 2¼d., whereafter is but a trifling calculation to realise that a rupee must be worth about seven tengas. But they had

Saduk Akhun—see page 231.

Hadji Raheem Sha—see page 171.

Kallick—see page 166.

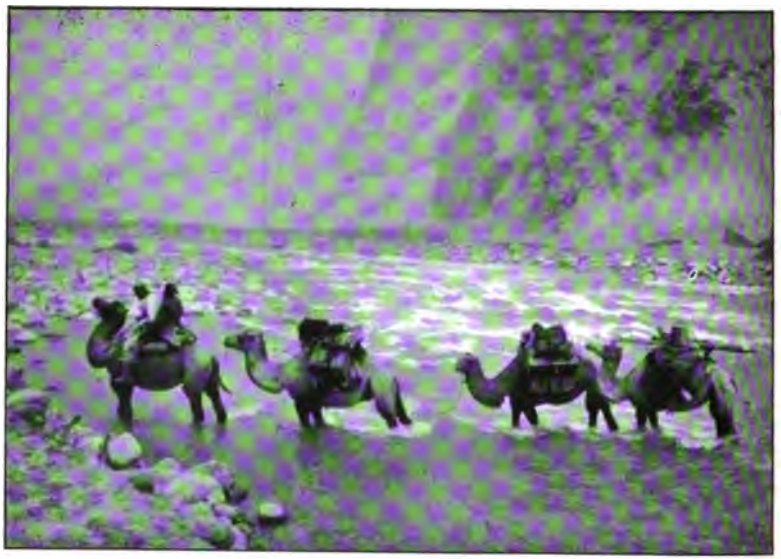
the impudence to come at me with five tengas to the rupee, Mirza introducing a man with a sack of them, while Kallick expatiated on the necessity of being provided on the road with a supply of coin current in the country. The blighting of human hope is a sad spectacle, and sometimes it is one man's duty to undertake it towards another. In the present instance I did not flinch from the task, though it is not in accord with my disposition to inflict discomfiture on a fellow-being. Sven Hedin was due at Kurgan a week or two later, and doubtless they kept the sack of tengas for him. But I have heard that Scandinavians look harder at a sixpence than even my own worthy countrymen, so doubtless he was vouchsafed strength to resist.

I spent a couple of days at Kurgan waiting for the Karakash river to go down. The crossing is dangerous when the stream is in flood, and the day before two men had been washed away and drowned. But in time news came that we might try, and my baggage went forward on camels, animals whose height gives them a great advantage over horses in fording rivers. Arrived at the bank, one of these great brutes with a reputation for braving the deep marched into the water until the loop of his neck was covered, giving the extraordinary impression of a neck and head towing a huge body. The surf from the rushing stream broke all over him, but he went superciliously onward, and in due time emerged dripping on the other side. There he knelt down and was relieved of his load, when he returned for me. Now I have ridden elephants and motor-bicycles and bolting horses without feeling more than the usual degree of human fear. But never had I chanced my life on a camel, and to be asked, at that time of life when silver threads begin to appear among the gold, to learn a new style of riding in the midst of a dangerous river, was highly unnerving. On a horse I were willing to brave

Niagara, but on a camel I felt like a murderer before a trickle of blood. Nevertheless it had to be, for I dare not belie my nationality in front of these bold mountaineers. I got down from the saddle to which long practice had so accustomed me, and approached the goggle-eyed brute, confident only that whatever he might do he couldn't kick while sitting on his stomach. But he looked like biting all over, and with such a neck he can reach for parishes.

On his back was a big cushion with two holes in it. Through these holes protruded the brute's humps—another proof of the rottenness of modern education, for at school I was taught to believe that camels had only one. From a tactical point of view it was clearly the thing to get between the humps as quickly as possible, and to trust that prudence would prevent the animal biting where he was liable to mistake camel for unwelcome jockey. I made a spring and reached my seat without accident, and then the man in charge swore at the beast. It immediately whistled loudly, and tried to buck me off, or rather I thought so in my alarm, for its method of rising to its feet gives the rider a feeling of earthquake underneath. It then proceeded to the river edge quite quietly, and I would have been confident enough were it not for a feeling that the hind legs might not always go as fast as the front ones, and that it might drift apart between the humps. But it stuck together all right, and plunged into the river, and, after a riotous few minutes among billows and foam, I saw the head arrive at the other side. Shortly afterwards my part of the beast climbed out of the water, and the danger was over.

The next encounter with the Karakash entailed a delay of four hours. The stream ran too fiercely for even the stilts of a camel, and so the baggage had to be man-handled over a fearsome spur from the adjacent



"Four times in one day we forded this Stygian affluent"—see page 169.

mountains, the while the animals went back upstream to a point where they might be swum across. From the brink of a precipice looking down on the ruined fort of Shahidowla I watched this painful performance, and internally petitioned that all other gifts which the gods might contemplate toward me might be cancelled in favour of a quintuple degree of patience. Four times in one day we forded this Stygian affluent, and many other times we squeezed by a bulwark of rock along which it raced in diminished fury. The camels managed these difficult places with comparative ease, but on small ponies it was risky work, and more than once I felt my little Trojan lifted off his feet by an extra rush in the water. But the instinct of self-preservation is strong in a horse, and he has no head to lose at a critical moment, like a human being. He just downs his hindquarters and plunges until he finds bottom. And when he finds bottom, his head is always pointing in the right direction. Kallick, on most of these occasions, absolutely declined to keep to horseback—he looks as if he had too much on his conscience—and had to be perched on the top of a loaded camel, which I will always believe caused him more agony than will the advent of his latter end.

But the Karakash did not last for ever, and there succeeded it one of those passes with which I fear to trouble the reader, for have I not worked the pass, its height, peculiarities, and dangers, to the very death? But the Sanju Pass is the very last which I shall inflict upon notice, and I believe everybody will agree that it is a brute. From the Karakash at about 9000 feet there runs a gully to the west, just a fissure in the mountains, chokeful of unspeakable debris. This runs up to the Sanju Pass, a distance of five miles and an ascent of 7600 feet. The going was horrible. Half-way up we found a sort of building, which Kallick informed

choicest that the bazaars of India could produce. Owing to the rectitude of his life and the honesty of his dealings, the Almighty had entrusted him with the custody of considerable wealth, and now, towards the close of his days, he had accomplished that which is the aim and hope of every good Mussulman. In his old age he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and, if God willed, he would return across the passes to die in his own home. And looking at the frail old man, and listening to the shortness of his breath, it seemed just about even money whether he would or no.

With him was his son, a tall and powerfully-made young man with the face of a Greek. It was easy to see that the Hadji had married elsewhere than in his native land. The Central Asian cap lined with astrakhan, and set well back on the head, gave the son a Mercury-like appearance, while the light complexion and frank open countenance suggested anything but the parentage of the dark and withered old man before me. There must be a devilish handsome mother somewhere to account for this youth. Besides his son, the Hadji was accompanied by two sheep. These had travelled with him from Khotan to Kashmir, where they had waited while he made the all-important journey to far Arabia. And it began to look as if, by the grace of God, the sheep would be spared to return to their native land. Heaven had been kind, and the Hadji had found plenty to eat by the way, so their slaughter had not been necessary. They had become as tame as dogs, and ran about his camp as they listed. The Hadji also had a servant and two or three ponies with baggage, so that he travelled in comfort as far as possible. But these long marches in the hot sun, the terrific drop in the temperature at night, and the strain on heart and lungs from the rarefied air, were sapping strength, and the Hadji was prepared to lay his bones in the wilderness if Heaven so willed it.

What mattered it where the body rested if the soul went to Paradise? And the latest act of the Hadji's life had been to make peace with God. So the Hadji remained serene, content in the present and confident of the future. A hard case according to Exeter Hall, but what would not many a storm-tossed doubter between High and Low, between Big and Wee Free, give to enjoy a similar frame of mind and an equal degree of faith?

On the road you go as you please. Some travel early and some late. Some make a long day's journey and then rest half a day, while others slog away by short stages. My custom was to pound along until servants and horses had had enough, then to halt and rest them, the while I scoured the mountains for game. A fat buck or wild sheep brought joy to the camp, and filled with good meat bellies that seldom knew aught beyond the porridge of the country. And so, though the Hadji and I did not often travel in company, it frequently happened that our halting-places coincided. On such occasions I heard about his family, his property, his business, and the matters that filled his aged mind. Near the Suget Pass, after ten days in the heights on either side of the Karakoram, he had become very weak, his bones ached and his head burned, and he feared that his heart would fail him when within sight of home. But the old man remained cheerful, and never failed to greet me with inquiries for my health. One day I shot a hare, and delivered the *halal* with my own knife, and then presented the animal to the Hadji. He swore afterwards that he had eaten it up completely, bones and all, and that his heart thereby had been greatly uplifted. As he neither smoked nor drank, and would not touch my tea, I have my doubts whether so newly purified a person spoke the literal truth. But it remains that the incident of the hare made him my friend for life, and if he did

name of Mahomet called upon his God until, as happened to Elijah in the wilderness, I almost expected to see the ravens come fluttering earthward.

While crossing the Depsang Plain we came to a spur of rock from which my pony shied violently. I then discovered that in a small cave sat a man, who immediately afterwards hailed Kallick in terms of recognition. I thought no more of this individual, whom Kallick explained was a Hadji returning to Yarkand. But some days later, when riding along, I discerned something lying on the track, which on drawing near turned out to be the prone figure of a man. As I approached, the figure did not move, and I began to suspect a tragedy. Only when I shouted loudly was there any response, and then the figure rose up with a jerk that sent my pony a quarter of a mile in terror. This was my friend of the cave asleep by the way. He was a very old man, and appeared to have fallen from exhaustion, but as Kallick said he would be picked up by my transport following in rear, I went on, Kallick the while telling me who he was and what he was doing in these desert parts.

Sinbad, for that is what I came to entitle him, was a native of Yarkand who had spent his life saving money to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. In extreme old age he had gathered together some seven or eight hundred rupees, and with this sum he had proceeded to Andijan, where the Russian railway gave him a big lift towards the goal of his ambition. In due time he reached Mecca and was purified from sin. But money for the return journey was limited, and he came back by steamer to Bombay, whence he had tramped and begged his way to Kashmir. It was plain enough sailing in populated regions, for India is the most charitable country in the world, but when it came to crossing the mountains the poor creature was in a corner. At Panamik he had scraped together sufficient food to carry

him over; but no food will put strength into an aged body, and he had sunk by the way.

I next encountered him some miles beyond camp aimlessly wandering along. In the clear air I could see a great distance ahead, and perceived that he did far more sitting down than walking, and that what walking he did was seldom in a straight line. The day was broiling hot, and the going heavy with sand, besides which the elevation was over 16,000 feet. When I reached the old man I thought he was done for. But he had plenty of voice, and said he was all right. I then told him to get up on my pony and ride for a short distance. He protested violently, and eventually I had to lift him into the saddle, for he could no more have climbed up than flown up. For forty minutes I tramped it, after which I would not have walked another yard to save even a Christian minister from eternal wrath. I ordered Sinbad to get down, which he was very loth to do, and, remounting, rode forward, keeping an eye to the rear to see what happened. Kallick and my shikari, both Mahomedans, were some way behind, and I wondered what they would do to succour their brother in the faith. I vowed that if they didn't do as much as their master, never a pice of buksheesh would either of them ever see from me. But my doubts were quickly dispelled, and the holy one mounted again. And henceforward none of us had a horse we could call our own. He became a regular Old Man of the Sea who could not be shaken off. We carried him in state to Kurgan, and there I gave him some money, and escaped by making an unexpected march.

The misfortune that happened to Mir Ghulam is perhaps worth recording. He began his journey from Kashgar with forty ponies of his own, and hired twelve more from Yarkand to carry merchandise and feed. The hirer was one Nar Mahomed, who accompanied his own horses and seemed to have formed a caravan separate

from his patron. When completely buried in the mountains, far from grass for the horses and far from the possibility of purchasing feed, Nar Mahomed dropped the merchandise, and with his twelve ponies and the stock of grain, whipped round, and by a circuitous route returned to Yarkand. Mir Ghulam, travelling by a parallel route, was ignorant that he had been left in the lurch until a Kalmuck herd told him that his goods were lying by the roadside at such and such a place. Thereafter Mir Ghulam's caravan had to transport the additional merchandise upon a stock of feed that was speedily exhausted, the reserve having been levanted with by Nar Mahomed. In consequence, at the Saser Pass, no less than fourteen of his animals died of weakness.

Leaving his caravan at the pass that the remaining horses should be kept alive until he brought food for them, Mir Ghulam proceeded to Panamik, where he met me and unfolded his tale of woe. All his horses were useless for the present, and it was costing him some hundreds of rupees to obtain transport to carry his goods the remaining few stages into Leh. As a fellow-subject of the Sirkar, he called upon me to take his deposition, and with due solemnity I recorded his statement on foolscap, cross-examined his witnesses and noted their declarations, made the whole crowd swear a bloody oath, and obtained the signatures of all the official and quasi-official people in the village. The portentous documents arising therefrom I now folded up and placed in a big blue envelope, which I sealed with ceremony and addressed to the British Agent at Kashgar, with the request that he would take immediate steps to cause the Chinese Government to bring the offender to justice. Mir Ghulam then expressed himself satisfied, and everybody present bore the expression of having assisted at a righteous termination to a scandalous case. What Mr Macartney might do with the papers, and what Nar

Mahomed may have to say in defence, Heaven alone knows. But it added zest to my progress towards Kashgar to know that I was an important sharer in a case that promised to become a *cause célèbre* of these parts.

Of Ebrahim, who first offered me tea on the road, and who has since been as a brother; of the Yarkandi syce whose foot was crushed by a horse and which I cured by a poultice; of the boy with the swelling under his chin which I eased with two rupees; and of half a dozen others, what can I write that the reader who lives amidst the fleshpots would care to read? It needs hard living and plain fare to reduce human sympathies to a level that includes one's humbler brethren. Indeed it is only on the road that one can gain touch with such simple people, for when one comes to houses and Begs and Aksakals, and their hosts of followers who hasten at one's bidding, the little friends of the tent-door and the shadow of the rock are frightened away. It is one of the drawbacks to travel, too, that those whom one meets, and likes, seldom cross one's path again. It is a far cry to Asia, and I fear it will never again be my fate to visit certain remote spots where dwell some few Israelites in whom I know there is no guile.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERT AND OASIS.

At Sanju I heard that Dr Stein, the celebrated archæologist, was then at Khotan, a place I had wished to see but had been deterred from including in my plans, as to visit it meant adding 300 miles to my journey. But the chance of meeting a fellow-countryman, and one, moreover, so learned in all that was interesting in Turkestan, caused me to change my mind, and accordingly we hurried away from Sanju, intending to cover the distance to Khotan in quick time. This appeared to be possible, for owing to the courtesy of the Chinese officials at Sanju relays of horses were promised on the way.

Leaving Sanju in the morning, we made a hot and tiring journey of thirty miles to the oasis of Zanguia, where, after a brief rest, we resumed the march on what were said to be fresh horses. Our next stoppage was to be a place bearing the euphonious name of Pialma, and on the way thither we obtained a real taste of desert in a hot country. We were advised to travel by night, because of the heat of the day, and if we must start before midnight, when the moon arose, it were well to have a guide for fear of losing the way. I scoffed at the idea of the guide, but was overruled by Kallick, who flatly declined to budge without an escort. And Kallick proved to be wiser

than his master. The distance to be traversed was a vague quantity, rendered more vague by the efforts of my followers to translate it into terms that appealed to my comprehension. But the fact is that nobody knew how far it was. In Asia you start in the morning and you finish in the evening, and to desire any measurement more definite is sheer aggravation to Providence. By starting in the evening every living soul in the oasis knew we could not arrive before morning. Only I cherished the fond belief that by ten the march would be over, and that by eleven I should be asleep in a comfortable camp-bed with a good supper inside me.

Riding through the oasis was delightful, but the broad desert soon replaced the pleasant gardens and fields of Zanguia. At seven it grew dusk, and at half-past darkness fell upon the land, and I realised that my gallant hired steed was already a tired beast. But that is a common experience in the East, and with a sigh I resigned myself to the usual hard labour with a heavy whip. There is no other way to get these poor brutes to move, and Heaven only knows whether they sham tired or not. Anyhow they can shy and bolt when for hours they appear to have been so leg-weary as to be hardly able to put one foot before the other. As for trot and canter, after the first hour one might as well bestride a lion in Trafalgar Square, and expect to whip it off its pedestal. A poor four miles an hour is all a Central Asian horse is willing to do, and you may scourge him to ribbons without getting any better result.

The descent of darkness upon the desert is not without charm. The haze that hangs over the horizon slowly closes in like a ring of fog. The pearly light in the sky gradually pales into colourless grey, and before one realises it the stars are twinkling in the firmament. Road there is none, for the sand is not amenable. The tracks of other travellers are obliterated by a breath of

wind as effectually as the waves of the sea blot out the wake of a ship. And the flat expanse of desert, or the still more dreary gorse betufted dunes, offer no landmark to guide the footsteps. It grew darker and darker, until the white sand itself was hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding blackness. No guide in the world could steer a course on such a night, and it soon became evident that we were strayed from the true direction. Kallick was greatly exercised, and cursed our guide with a fervour he had better reserved for prayer. The unfortunate man wandered hither and thither in search of some indication of the line usually followed by travellers. Needless to say he found none, and we were reduced to the use of my compass, until the matches gave out. Then the tail of my old friend the Bear served us for a while, and we steered due east until bogged in a maze of dunes. These rose in front and behind like huge mountains, that melted under the horses' feet with magic suddenness as we stumbled across them. One side was a gradual slope of firm ground, the other a steep descent of loose sand in which our tired animals plunged and floundered. Half an hour of these ruthless hillocks and we halted, perceiving that further progress was useless. We must wait for the moon.

We dismounted and sat down in the sand, and I now realised why our guide carried a large melon with a tender care that added greatly to the difficulties of horsemanship. Kallick had also expressed anxiety about the melon, to my wonder, for they are as plentiful as peas wherever one goes in this country. I was thirsty, and a huge slice of the musky, water-logged fruit was like a draught of new life. Kallick and the guide sucked and wallowed over their share like a regiment of pigs. Then we all lay down on the cool sand, while the horses grouped themselves as near as we would let them. A wriggle or two resulted in a perfect bed of ease that

invited sleep—no mosquitoes, no noise, no glare; only the silence of the desert that holds no living creature, darkness illumined by the distant sparkle of stars, and the faintly aromatic breath of a gentle night-wind. I dug my hand into the sand beside me and marvelled at its fine and silky texture as it escaped, like water, from my closed fist. On the top it was cool and dry, but a few inches down warm and seemingly moist. It smelt sweet and clean, fit to be the couch of a princess. . . . . And then it was brilliant moonlight, and the nutmeg-grater that Kallick keeps in his throat proclaimed the need to be up and doing.

We trudged heavily over the dunes for half an hour, and then reached more level ground. Here the guide struck marks which he said had been made by horsemen during the day. We followed these faint indications for some distance, and then encountered a gaunt pole sticking upright in the sand—a sign to the traveller. The track regained, our pilot was able to follow it in the moonlight, and thereafter we had no trouble. For hours and hours we waded across the sea of sand, and at daylight sand still surrounded us in every direction. The sun rose higher and higher, and the heat increased. Little whirl-winds skimmed along before and on either hand, like wild animals startled by the presence of man. The haze on the horizon grew ever upward, and finally closed in above. Gusts of wind caught up curtains of sand and flung them in our faces. The air grew hot and sultry, and we tasted the bitterness of the desert. And just as the coming storm was about to break, out of the dimness ahead there loomed a huge dark wall—the trees of an oasis! A moment more and we were in a shady avenue, our horses' feet tramping the water of a runnel, our lungs swelling to the cool and pure air, and our eyes greeted on every hand by the lovely green of growing things.

Were it not for the dry old stick that rode behind me, I could have dropped from my horse and fallen prone in thanksgiving. But Kallick being within earshot, I dare not give vent even to a song of praise. Perhaps the old rascal was glad to be rid of the nightmare of the desert, and after sixteen hours of sand to plunge into vegetation, but his dour and ugly countenance gave no evidence of his feelings. To me it seemed like Paradise after a long and painful purgatory. The dreariness and loneliness of the desert, the utter absence of life and the limitless extent of the sandy waste, the fatigue of urging an exhausted animal throughout the night and far into the hot and dusty day, had all combined to fill the soul with melancholy and hopelessness. One felt like a convict condemned for life to serve in the galleys. Want of sleep and food had dulled the nerves, and it was when longing and expectation had given way to apathy that the sudden apparition of the oasis abruptly wakened the faculties.

The imagery of the East is surely a product of physical environment. It is the Moslem world that has given us most of the colour and fancy that we attribute to the Oriental mind. And when it is remembered that the faith of the Prophet is held mostly in countries where wilderness exists in sharp contrast to fertility, we find the key to the ideas that have inspired much of Eastern poetry. North Africa, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, and Turkestan are Mussulman, and comparatively rainless countries that owe their cultivation to constant irrigation. These are all regions of sand, vast stretches of desert, with here and there patches of fertile ground that shine like jewels on a colourless background. It is the oases in continual contrast with desolation that stimulates Oriental imagination; the lifeless, burning wastes of sand that emphasise the charm and beauty of spreading trees and running water, of magic palaces and dark-eyed houris.

A view in the oasis of Khotan.

A Bridge in Turkestan.

To the dweller in temperate climes it is hard to convey an idea of the oases that alone in this land are habitable. It needs a knowledge of the ghastly desert, and a taste of its bitterness, to quicken the appreciation. Riding in the haze that is characteristic of this country at all seasons except autumn, one suddenly realises that in the dust-laden atmosphere ahead there is a dark broken line, as if a range of mountains barred the way. This appearance gradually increases in size and in darkness, until unexpectedly it turns out to be a mass of dense foliage close at hand, and not hills in the dim distance. Hardly does one comprehend the proximity of the oasis than one is there, and the day's journey at an end. From absolute desert the track plunges into a narrow lane flanked with tall trees whose branches meet overhead. Beyond is a low leafy avenue, and on either side fields covered with tall green crops. Willows and poplars in double lines follow the road, and between each double line is a canal of running water. Every now and then these canals cross the road, the smaller ones in a banked-up bed through which a horse walks, the bigger spanned by rustic bridges whose wooden planks resound dully to the tramp of the hooves. Here and there are clusters of buildings, presenting to the road straight mud walls, in which open gateways permit passing glimpses of picturesque interiors. These are farmhouses, low dwellings built of mud and wooden beams, single-storied and windowless to the road, and quite devoid of architectural ambition. But the courtyards and pillared verandahs that are visible inside every gate make one long to investigate these tree-embowered and nestling abodes.

Many of the fields that skirt the way are on a higher level, so every now and then the ears are greeted by the thunder of a mimic waterfall. A small stream spouts through the hollow trunk of a tree and plunges noisily

into a pool. Such places are the joy of village urchins, male and female, who, in the clothes they were born, disport boisterously from early morn to dewy eve. Where the bridges are, there are loungers gossiping to the gentle stimulus of the murmuring water. Mothers with babes in cradles, and elder ones sprawling naked in the clean soft loess, bring their knitting here, and under the shade of the trees coo lullabies, or scarify their neighbours, according to the exigency of the moment.

Each oasis has its bazaar, a counterpart almost of its equivalent in India. But there is the difference that the Turkestan street is completely shaded by an awning of matting. Rows of shops on either side have little verandahs supported by wooden pillars, which extend upward through the roof to a height of sixteen or twenty feet. Upon these are cross-beams that support the matting, a tattered protection which here and there lets the light through and spangles the road with brilliant sunbeams. The bazaar is a dim and dusky place at first, and infinitely satisfying to eyes aching with the heat and dust of the desert. On the proper day it is a crowded and busy place, but for six days of the week it is deserted, a cool and silent aisle along which village ancients and little children proceed sedately. The shopkeepers are elsewhere, their goods carried by strings of donkeys, and in due sequence they will visit neighbouring bazaars, changing each quaint and peaceful, shady street into a scene of moving colour and a babel of contending tongues.

A Beg of pious memory has built a house at Pialma and dedicated it to the traveller. On the gate there is an invitation to enter in the name of God and make use of the house and garden, free of charge. On reaching this hospitable door our horses turned their heads willingly, and we entered a little square containing a pond fringed by trees. Having sent my baggage on

ahead, the caretakers were ready to receive me, and I found my camp-bed, chair, and table open and ready. On the latter were two flat vessels full of milk, upon which the cream lay thick and yellow. Another dish was heaped up with peaches, another with grapes, while a third held a huge melon. The peaches were a pale-green colour, and soft and velvety to the touch. With a knife I cut one in two, and put the inside of the stoneless half against my lips. A gentle pressure on the outside, and the fruit became flesh of my flesh. Cool and luscious it was, and the flavour like unto the breath of the queen of a Sultan's harem.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KHOTAN.

KHOTAN lies on one of the two great routes which in ancient times connected China with Western Asia. In the Chinese annals there are numerous references to Yu'Tien, the earliest of which I believe are to be found in history relating to the first Han dynasty (B.C. 204–A.D. 24). Yu in Chinese signifies jade, for the production of which Khotan has ever been famous, and with which its name has been connected in the literature of China from olden up to the present time. Students of ancient Central Asian history tell us that Khotan was on the road between China and the river Oxus, the neighbourhood of which indicated the natural division between what might be regarded as the western and eastern portions of the then known world. The tide of Buddhism that slowly flowed over China is known to have passed from India through Kashmir, Afghanistan, and neighbouring regions into the Chinese Turkestan of to-day, whence it continued eastward through Khotan on the southern side, and Aksu on the northern side, of the great Takla-makan, or Tarim Desert, as it has been christened by Europe. At the same time, through the Oxus country there came a current of Western influence that has left a clear mark on the ancient art of this country, evidence of which is frequently visible in the seals, pottery, and carved figures that are continually being found among the ruins of

buried cities. It is quite clear that Eastern Turkestan was a civilised country two thousand years ago, and served as a medium for the transmission of both Indian and Greek ideas to China. But it has yet to be ascertained to what extent Chinese culture filtered westward, and how much it has influenced the civilisation of Europe.

In A.D. 399 a Chinese monk called Fa'hien started from Chang-gan, in the province of Shensi, and made a journey that in these days would be regarded as no small undertaking, but which performed in ancient times was bold and enterprising to an astonishing degree. Fa'hien was an ardent disciple of Buddhism, and his ambition was to travel westward through Turkestan and thence to India, where he desired to prosecute a search for certain of the Books of Discipline, which were imperfectly represented in China. He further desired to study his religion in the country of its origin, and to visit the holy places sanctified by the birth and life of Buddha. It is interesting to note that he selected the route by which Buddhism was believed originally to have reached China. His road to the western border of China is easily traced, but thereafter it is obscure until he reached Khotan. Here he describes the town, its institutions, and geographical bearing so accurately that, although the Khotan of those days is buried many feet under sand, there is no difficulty in identifying it. Thereafter Fa'hien crossed the Kuen Len and Karakoram Mountains and landed in Northern India, his exact route being a subject of much dispute among scholars. After a long stay in India, he took ship at a point on the coast near the mouth of the Hughli, sailed to Ceylon, and from there went by sea between Java and Sumatra, eventually arriving in China after twelve years' absence. His adventures as recorded in his book of travels were marvellous, and he succeeded in bringing back many of the books of which he went in search.

Two and a half centuries later another Chinese pilgrim visited Khotan, and recorded facts which are confirmed by modern discovery. Hieun-Tsiang arrived in India by sea, and travelled through Afghanistan to Turkestan, also following the route by which Buddhism worked its way from India to China. Scholars have been able to identify many of the places he visited, and all educated Chinese are acquainted with his travels. The next great voyager to visit Khotan was Marco Polo, and after him there came several mediæval explorers of lesser note. The first modern traveller to reach Khotan was Johnson, in 1865, since when Stein, Deasy, Hedin, and a few others have visited this most distant and remote corner of the globe.

Properly speaking, Khotan is the name of a district, and not a town. Khotan in the time of Fa'hien was an independent kingdom, since when it has had varying fortune, sometimes forming part of a larger kingdom, and occasionally existing as a separate state. At the rise of Yakoob Beg it had been independent for some years, but the Bedaulat soon enclosed it within his powerful grasp. With the fall of Yakoob Beg it passed into Chinese hands again, and is now merely a district under the Tao-tai of Kashgar. Of the several towns and many villages which compose the district, Ilchi is the capital, and this is the city marked on modern maps as Khotan. The dimension of the whole of the Khotan oasis is about 400 square miles, with a population estimated at nearly 200,000. Of these there may be 50,000 resident in Ilchi, but exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, as the population is continually moving between country farmhouses and dwellings in the town.

From Sanju to Khotan is about 110 miles, and this distance we covered in fifty hours, of which over thirty were spent in the saddle, changing horses four times. On arrival at Khotan we inquired for the Indian Aksakal,

a local cloth merchant of Bajauri descent, who represents the British Empire for emoluments that amount to Rs. 40 per mensem. Passing through several streets, we came upon one where a small crowd blocked the way. Here I was astonished to be addressed in English by a man wearing what looked like British uniform. This individual turned out to be Dr Abdul Aziz, once hospital assistant to the Agency at Kashgar, and now retired and practising medicine on his own account. Among the people who quickly surrounded us was the Aksakal, who greeted me warmly, and said he had been expecting me for months. I was deeply disappointed also to hear that Dr Stein had left Khotan for the mountains the day before, so I unfortunately missed the opportunity of making his acquaintance and hearing something at first-hand of the progress of his plans. While conversing with the doctor I cast my eyes to the side of the street, and there perceived a very stout woman sitting on the edge of a shop verandah. She it was who had attracted the crowd. She was a sufferer from dropsy, and had paid my new friend a large sum to relieve her of the hogshead or so of water that had collected in her body. The doctor, not liking to make a mess of his dispensary, had taken the good woman into the street, and there operated upon her. She was now visibly lessening, to the marvel of the onlookers and the enhancement of the doctor's reputation.

The Aksakal is the centre of the little colony of emigrants from over the Himalayas, and the doctor also lives among the thick of his kind. Some twenty familiarly clad and mannered people, who salaamed in Indian fashion and spoke Hindustani, having collected, we all moved off to the abode awaiting me, our procession arousing considerable interest among the natives as we passed through some narrow streets. At the Nar Bagh I found a bundle of newspapers and a letter from Dr

Stein, who had just vacated the same quarters. The Nar Bagh deserves some mention, if only on account of its origin, which was due to the artistic taste of Niaz Beg, the Governor of Khotan when Yakoob Beg lorded it over Eastern Turkestan. Outside the city we passed along some delightful wooded lanes, and then came to a very high and uninteresting mud wall, over which showed a forest of trees. Entering a gate, we passed through a courtyard of extreme ugliness, and then into another with verandahed buildings. Approaching by a low doorway, we found ourselves first in a room with raised dais, evidently a waiting-place for servants. Through another door there was a large dim chamber latticed with wood, carved with the delicate tracery of Saracenic art. Thence through a passage we entered the garden beyond. Down a flagged walk, deeply scored with shadow, there peeped through the trees the roof of a small building, the summer-house where I was to live. Inside this dainty pavilion the floor and dais on either side were covered with the famous richly-coloured carpets of Khotan. Eight windows of lattice-work let in a pleasant light from the shady garden outside, and the scent of flowers and the twittering of birds that drifted through kindled the desire to dwell here to the end of one's days.

The minions of the Aksakal now brought in the bundles they carried and covered the table with plates, which they heaped up with sweetmeats of various kinds. A huge tray of fruit, comprising a melon, peaches, grapes, nectarines, and four different kinds of plums, immediately attracted my attention, and for half an hour I behaved like a famished wolf. The Mussulmans and Hindus from India arrived in great numbers to pay their respects to the Sahib from their own country, and I had to do the honours with tea and slices of the melon. The Mahomedans were graciously pleased to eat and drink in my company, but the Hindus would not risk their eternal welfare to

please me. But they were all charmingly deferential, and made me feel quite like a rajah in his own durbar hall. They based their homage on the fact that they were subjects of the Sirkar, and gave me the impression that they were glad to see me out of pure patriotism. In India one would smile at such an idea, but here it seems different: strangers in a foreign land, perhaps, develop sympathies that will not flourish at home.

In the afternoon we went for a ride round the town. The doctor lent me his horse, the tallest in Khotan, a handsome chestnut mare from Badakshan, with arching neck, sweeping tail, and undecided forelegs. She was wont to carry the attenuated little doctor without knowing it, but a heavy-handed, twelve-stone rider was not at all to her liking. The highly fed brutes, caparisoned in silver and rainbow, ridden by my numerous escort, were also on their hind legs, so our progress through the city indicated its inspection by persons of high rank. As we passed through the streets everybody sitting down stood up, and everybody walking pressed to the side to let us pass, whilst low and respectful *salaam-alaikums* proceeded from many bowing figures. The narrow bazaars were full of people on foot and on horseback, and in the shops a countless variety of merchandise was displayed in the open verandahs. Bakers' shops and cookhouses seemed to predominate, the latter savoury to the nostrils and appetising to the eye. Saddlers were greatly in evidence, while fruit-sellers occupied every possible niche and corner. Not a little of the charm of this quaint city is due to the coverings which shade every busy street. The pleasant half-light conceals nothing of interest, and perhaps hides much that would lose picturesqueness in the glare of broad day.

Bazaars all over the East are much alike in general aspect, and if one is to find variation it must be in the people. Turkestan in this respect is distinctly different

from anything in India, probably because the people are solid Mahomedan instead of being divided into many religions and castes. India gives an impression of gravity and inscrutability, and of poverty, which is entirely lacking here. There are no naked coolies in the streets, the colour of the people is much lighter, everybody appears to be well clad and well fed, while the emotions are freely indicated on the faces around one. The numbers of women in the streets and in the shops add no little to the colour and life, and prompt the observation that here is an eminently human and natural scene.

Fa'hien recorded that the Buddhist monks of Khotan numbered "several myriads," or so at least his translators have interpreted him. Hieun-Tsiang also speaks of large numbers, and both make frequent reference to handsome and well-appointed monasteries. But of these there is not a trace left, and throughout the oasis there is not a single building possessing architectural pretensions. The hard-burnt bricks that were common in the days of Yakoob Beg are hardly used at all nowadays, the material employed for building being mud or sun-dried bricks of the roughest description. The Mahomedan musjids that have replaced the Buddhist monasteries are nothing but miserable mud hovels, without any ecclesiastical appearance, and in which there is no furniture. Public buildings there are none, for the Yamen and barracks are the ordinary Chinese houses, without aspiration to beauty or dignity, though the style is not altogether lacking in impressiveness. So Khotan has nothing to show in architecture, and when the bazaar has been inspected there is nothing left to see, except the people, who, as everywhere else, present endless variety of type and temperament.

In addition to the bazaar of Ilchi there is what is known as the Yangi Shahr, or new city, an attachment

to all the important towns of Chinese Turkestan. Having retaken the country after the death of Yakoob Beg, the Chinese built a species of fort close to all the cities, the object being to provide a place of refuge in case of local revolt. These forts are surrounded by high mud walls, with battlements and loopholes, bastions, ditches, and other contrivances of fortification. In the event of a row the Chinese would retire inside these forts, which, though perfectly useless from a modern point of view, could easily be defended against attack not supported by artillery. The Yangi Shahr at Khotan is about 400 yards square, and the inside differs very little in appearance from the town outside its gates. There are more Chinese shops and more wearers of the pigtail, but the native population swarms, and the Chinese might find themselves in a corner in the event of a sudden rising. That, however, would appear to be the remotest of possibilities, for the country, so far as I had yet been able to discover, has no grievance whatever against the ruling power.

Hardly had I settled myself down in Nar Bagh than there arrived an important messenger bearing the visiting-card of the Amban, or Governor of Khotan. This personage's name being transcribed amounts to Che-Tajen, and was printed in large black letters on a sheet of red paper. His messenger came to apologise that I had not been met outside the city in a style befitting my dignity, and to say that the official at Sanju would be decapitated for not announcing my approach with the celerity that would have enabled the Amban to have done the honours of his town. His Excellency trusted that I would forgive the omission, and begged to know when it would be convenient for me to receive his visit. I immediately represented to the messenger that the official at Sanju had been most kind and attentive, and that it would pain me greatly

if his head should roll in the dust on my account. The envoy promised to convey my gracious intercession, and the Aksakal pointed out to me afterwards that this was only the Chinese idea of politeness. He further congratulated me upon having made the orthodox reply, and said my *izzat* would be greatly augmented thereby at the Yamen. I also told the messenger that I considered it my duty first to pay my respects to the Amban, and that I would do myself the honour to call upon him on the following day.

The Aksakal and my servants evidently regarded the forthcoming civilities with great satisfaction. Kallick said I must put on my best clothes, while Raheem, who was to interpret, rigged himself out in a style that put my own humble shooting-gear sadly in the shade. At twelve o'clock there was a big muster in the courtyard, and the Aksakal sent a man galloping to warn the Yamen that the visitor was coming. Our procession was headed by a Yuz-bashi, dedicated by the Chinese to my service while I stayed in Khotan. I followed this personage at a distance of six lengths, riding the doctor's mare, who from her behaviour must have had a whin-bush entangled in her tail. Half a length in rear the Aksakal attended me, riding a magnificent black mule that was almost hidden beneath silver plate and silken saddlecloths. Then came Raheem and a long tail of riders clad in highly coloured robes. Evidently it was business to proceed slowly and to impress the populace with the high spirit of our horses and the brilliancy of our equipment.

The doctor's mare did most of the short distance sideways, and frightened a great number of people, including her rider. The circus behind me squealed and kicked and reared to the entire satisfaction of the Aksakal, who said it was necessary for a Sahib to make a commotion when he rode abroad. Arrived at the Yamen we all

The Amban of Khotan—see page 197.

The Parade-ground at Khotan—see page 203.

advanced to a big door, the opening of which was the signal to dismount. Passing through the gateway I found myself in a large courtyard lined with spearmen standing at attention. Several doors, one behind the other, now opened, and there appeared a vista of flagged courtyards, down which hurried with outstretched hands a beautifully dressed and beaming Chinaman. For the moment I was in terror of being embraced, and suffered a severe repetition of the shudder that came over me when, in a recent 'Times,' I read how the unfortunate Edward VII. had been kissed on both cheeks by the Emperor William. But when dressed in their best the Chinese abjure all doubtful habits, and so I only found myself cordially shaking hands with my host.

He led me by the hand through the courtyards until we arrived at the holy of holies, a small room upholstered in red and hung with texts from the Analects. Here a small table was covered with sweets, fruits, cigarettes, &c. The tea ceremony came first. The Amban took a beautiful gold enamelled cup from an attendant, held it in both hands, bowed over it like a *prima donna* with a bouquet, and then set it before me. Then he dropped six large lumps of sugar into it, stirred it, and beseeched me to drink. But having been there before I knew what to do, and I bowed over and sugared his own cup with a vigour that must have made him thirsty for a week. We now proceeded to conversation.

He had a Turki interpreter and so had I. He spoke Chinese to his, and I spoke Hindustani to mine, so it is conceivable that by the time my British sentiments were reduced to Chinese their character may have altered somewhat. All my people had crowded into the room after me, and whatever space was left vacant his attendants filled. But only he and I occupied chairs.

After the usual inquiries and answers regarding my journey we proceeded to more general topics. He asked

me why I had come to Turkestan, and I asked him what his salary was. He inquired if I was married, and I inquired his age. He said Khotan was a filthy place, and I said it was more like heaven than an earthly city. He said that the Chinese were dirt under the feet of Europeans, and I said it was only swine that trod upon pearls. He said that the Viceroy of India came next to Providence, and I said that the Emperor of China was above them both.

After that I took my leave, and he said he would return my visit on the following day. He escorted me to the gate, the while a band played, to the uneasiness of the waiting horses, who were as impatient of discord as their masters. We shook hands with great impressiveness, and I then turned to mount. Just as I had one foot in the stirrup and a leg in the air, a cannon was fired. By grace I was able to remain in the saddle, but a second thunderous discharge, and then a third, drove the horses mad with excitement, and I felt that if the salute was going to be seventeen or nineteen guns I would be quite undone. Fortunately I was not ranked higher than three, and we filed out of the Yamen with an *éclat* highly gratifying to the Aksakal, but not at all to the peace of my nerves.

We now proceeded to the barracks to call upon the General commanding the troops. The gallant officer was not quite ready, and we remained mounted while he donned his finery. In his courtyard was a prisoner wearing the *cangue*, a contrivance like a table with a hole in the centre. It takes a good deal of carrying, for the iron-bound wood is heavy, and when once fixed round a man's neck he cannot get his hands near his mouth. In the present instance the wearer had knelt down with the edge of the *cangue* resting on the ground, and his head sticking through the hole at a most uncomfortable angle, so that a little boy might

most interested in all sorts of military matters, and with plentiful recollections of travellers who had visited him from time to time, among them Bower in 1890. I afterwards discovered that he was a great opium-smoker, and his bad manners at my first visit must have been due to his being disturbed too soon after the morning pipe. We parted on most friendly terms, and I accepted his invitation to come and inspect his troops and armoury on the following day.

On leaving I was on the look-out for a salute, having my suspicions that the gun-firing was timed to catch a departing visitor unawares. Having shaken hands with the General, I turned, grasped bridle and mane in one hand, and lifted my foot. Thus I dwelt, and sure enough, bang went the first gun. But this time the doctor's mare worked all her excitement into an empty saddle, and when she calmed down I mounted with the dignity becoming a person somewhat advanced into the sere and yellow leaf.

As already mentioned, it was evidently the thing to ride to visits at a decorous pace, but the after etiquette is quite different. No sooner was I mounted than the Yuz-bashi clapt his heels to his horse and went off like a rocket. The old mare darted after him, and in a second the whole of our cavalcade was in full gallop through the barracks, out at the gate, down a side road, and into the bazaar. The bazaar was crammed with people, but the Yuz-bashi tore through them roaring "KHUSH! KHUSH!" and laying about him with his whip in a fashion I would have deemed entirely cheerful were it not that I feared the mare would crumple up under me. The only thing I definitely remember about that ride was the spryness with which grave, white-bearded Mullahs and Hadjis took the wall as we swept by like a tornado. One old jack-in-the-box sprang right from under my horse's feet, and as we shaved past him my foot and stirrup, with

a loud crack, split the end three feet of his floating robe.

The Amban was to return my visit in the morning, so I spent all the forenoon dressed in my best kit, which all happens to be hot and woollen. Prior to his arrival he sent me a sheep, two ducks, two fowls, a sack of rice, and a lot of other things. The General sent feed and forage sufficient for a squadron. I hoped they would come quickly, but the Amban arrived just as I was half through my frugal meal, and in no good humour owing to the heat of the day and the abominability of Kallick's cooking. The Amban came in a beautifully decorated cart, preceded and followed by spearmen, bannermen, trumpeters, and suchlike, who did not move in a body but spread themselves widely across the road so as to occupy all the space possible. The Amban was very pleasant and bright; and having exhausted the usual polite conversation at our first interview, we were able to talk upon general topics, subject of course to the interpreters, who always seemed to manage that questions were many laps ahead of answers. I ended the visit rather gracefully by taking the Amban's photograph on a film that I afterwards discovered had already been exposed twice. Not long afterwards the General came. Raheem had been cleaning my battery, and the General spotted the Mauser lying among the others, and said he had lately received 500 similar weapons for the rearmament of his men. When I saw them they turned out to be Mausers right enough, but they were dated '86, and bored so that I could get my thumb into the muzzles.

My visit of inspection to the barracks was not without incident. Having examined all sorts of quaint and old-fashioned weapons, kept in admirable order, I was shown half a dozen old cannon, taken from Yakoob Beg's army at the reconquest of the country. These had all been cast in Turkestan by natives of India, many of whom

The General who gave me a fish-like paw, and his Men see page 199.

feed him with chunks of melon. While watching this piece of charity, loud clanging resounded from inside, the doors were thrown open, and we beheld the General languidly stepping forward.

The Amban was an active and energetic young man with most pleasing manners, but the scraggy and pessimistic person who now gave me a fish-like paw was quite of another sort, and he hawed and hummed to such an extent when we were seated inside that I began to think he intended to be insolent. We went through the same laborious process of interpretation as at the Yamen, and I had almost begun to be annoyed with the indifference with which questions were asked and the answers received, when the inquiry was made whether I had ever visited China. That gave me a chance, and I said that I had been in Peking a few months before, mentioning casually that I had dined with a certain personage than whom there is nobody more influential in all the Celestial Empire. That made him sit up, and when I began to reel off generals and viceroys as being my intimate acquaintances, he greatly improved in manner. We then got on the subject of soldiering, and fancying that he now had me on toast, he asked if I had ever been in a war. This time I scored a palpable hit, and he quite sat up and said he did not know I was a soldier. Having denied that soft impeachment, I explained that I had been a volunteer only for the purpose of the war in South Africa. He asked how many men I had commanded. It would never have done to confess to having been only a lance-sergeant, so with mental wonder at my own moderation I said, "A hundred and twenty—with the rank of captain!" If any member of the old corps sees this, I trust he will admit that I was exceedingly modest—under the circumstances.

My host now woke up completely, and I found him

CHAPTER XIX.

ANCIENT KHOTAN.

THREE days of Khotan satisfied me, and we prepared to bid adieu to Nar Bagh. I paid farewell visits to the Amban and the General, and heard to my disgust that they both intended to escort me a few miles out of the town, and that preparations were already made to that effect. Now if one is to be escorted in style one must be clad accordingly, and if one is to be rigged out in style there can be no comfort on the road. My intention was to set forth in shirt-sleeves and a very ancient nether garment, and lacking certain accessories without which one would hardly appear in official company. Starting off in such an unencumbered fashion I hoped to ride through the afternoon, evening, and night, and so cover about eighty miles by morning. It was hard work choking off their Excellencies; but having warned them of the effect of the afternoon sun on their complexions, and of the check to public business which their absence would entail, I prevailed, and was persuaded to accept instead a courier from the Amban and a couple of mounted soldiers from the General, so that I might travel in honour and safety.

The Aksakal and his following were not to be got rid of so easily, but as the shirt-sleeves would do for them I did not mind. The doctor on his old mare, and my friend of the road, Hadji Raheem Sha, also joined in.

The Hadji, immediately on his arrival at Khotan, had sent me a huge basket of pears that out-Jargonelled anything I had ever eaten, and also invited me to a collation at his house, which I found to be surprisingly comfortable and well-appointed. I proposed matrimony to his little granddaughter, which breach of Mahomedan etiquette greatly tickled the other guests. We set forth at two in the afternoon, and rode through the bazaar and out at the western gate. Here sitteth the daughters of Eve who offer instalments of the delights of Paradise to weary travellers. I have yet to mention that the women of Khotan have looks far beyond the common, and that their milk-white skins and flashing eyes make them desirable throughout all Turkestan. But of that more anon; for the present the reader must be content to know that they smiled sweetly upon our party as we fared forth upon our long ride of 240 miles to Yarkand.

Three miles out of the city we came to a sort of rest-house, richly carpeted, and furnished with chairs and tables. Here the Chinese had meant to entertain me to a tea, cake, and wine banquet preliminary to bidding me a final farewell. I now separated from my friendly escort from the city, the parting with the aged Hadji savouring of the tragic, for he would not grant the possibility of our meeting again in Paradise. The courier rode in front and made the pace, I followed with Kallick, and the two soldiers formed a rearguard. Early in the journey these latter rode with considerable dignity, but when they began eating melons I thought they might as well return. So I presented them with a coin apiece, and bade them go back and tell their lord that owing to his courtesy I was travelling forward in much peace of mind. This rash statement brought its own reward, for a few minutes later my horse stumbled on to his nose, upon which he

scraped along for nearly twenty yards. He then recovered, and I fancied the saddle was further forward than it ought to be. But thinking it of no importance I rode on, until we came to a canal with rather a steep bank. Here my Bucephalus put his head down to drink, the saddle slipped over his withers, and I shot into the canal. The horse immediately turned and bolted back to the city, with Kallick and the courier after it. Wet and dirty, I remained alone by the roadside, wondering how many years it took to make a really complete horseman. In my predicament I came in for a good deal of sympathy from a little flock of children, who marvelled to see me sitting in the dust, horseless and servantless, and much the worse for wear. I suppose they thought I must have dropped from the clouds, for they went and told their father, a white-bearded mullah, who came out of a neighbouring house and offered me fruit and consolation. He wanted me to enter his dwelling, and I might have done it if there had been any chance of setting eyes on the mother of a beautiful little boy and girl that clung to either of his hands. But the ladies of a Mussulman household are not for the gaze of the Giaour, and so I decided to remain where I was. After an hour or so my horse was brought back and we proceeded on our journey.

A little to the south of the road, about seven miles west of Ilchi, are the remains of the ancient city of Khotan, now a village called Yotkan. Until about 1870 Yotkan existed without there being any indication that underneath lay the ruins of an old town, but now the artificial canal from the Karakash, which irrigated the fields, began to cut deeper into the soil, and in a short time formed a considerable ravine. At the end of this ravine some villagers then discovered gold in small flakes, and immediately began washing operations. These were so prolific that the fame of Yotkan quickly spread abroad

and numbers of gold-seekers appeared, the Governor of Khotan also employing large parties to dig and wash. The digging and washing required an increase of water, and the augmented canal cut deeper and deeper into the soft soil until the sides of the ravine in which it flowed showed perpendicular banks 25 or 30 feet high. By this time it was discovered that the cutting was taking place upon the site of an ancient city, many indications of which were visible on the sides of the ravine. Fragments of pottery, little images, and coins were found in large quantities, and digging operations were extensively prosecuted. The ruins apparently covered an area of about half a mile square.

Most of the rivers that flow into Chinese Turkestan from the south bring down gold in quantity that frequently pays to wash. But the dust found in this manner is totally different from the tiny flakes that alone are obtained at Yotkan, and the character of which puzzled many of the early visitors to Khotan. Curiously enough, the most reasonable explanation of the presence of gold in a form unknown elsewhere is to be found in the Travels of Fa'hien, who distinctly states that the splendid Buddhist temples and monasteries which he saw in 400 A.D. were richly overlaid with leaf-gold. It is now believed that the finds at Yotkan are nothing but the disintegrated remains of the precious metal which ornamented buildings and images at the time they were visited by the celebrated Chinese pilgrim. The only weakness in this explanation is that it suggests a lack of cupidity on the part of the ancient inhabitants of Khotan which has never been deemed a characteristic of humanity, in any part of the world or at any stage of its history. We can only suppose that the succession of wars which accompanied the religious revolution resulting in the substitution of the Moslem for the Buddhist faith caused the death of those most interested in Buddhistic institu-

tions, and that in the establishment of the new religion the value of the habitations of the old were forgotten.

Until lately it has been generally supposed that the burying of ancient Khotan was due to a tremendous flood which overwhelmed the city and forced the removal of the site to Ilchi. Dr Stein, however, very effectually disposes of that theory by pointing out that the continual irrigation of land by water discharged from the alluvial regions to the south must have had the effect of gradually raising the level of the ground. Silting up is a process that results in great changes, and when continued throughout a period of considerably over a thousand years it appears satisfactorily to account for the accumulation of many feet of soil upon the ancient site of Khotan. Dr Stein clinches his argument by drawing attention to the burying-places in this country, which are frequently found to lie far below the general level. Not being subjected to irrigation they remain at the original level, while the surface of the surrounding fields gradually rises. The same process is abundantly evident in the paths and roads which almost invariably are much below the surface of adjacent ground.

Dr Stein does not pursue his argument to what would appear to be a logical and very significant conclusion. In the case of ancient Khotan, lying some twenty feet below present levels, we must admit that special causes resulted in its abandonment. The continuous and bloody wars that preceded the permanent establishment of Mahomedanism probably originated in a new city adjoining the old fort that still exists beside Ilchi. The unpopular and unprofitable neighbourhood of the Buddhist town was speedily deserted for the busier Mussulman city, and ancient Khotan quickly crumbled up and became the sphere of the agriculturist. The silting-up process then combined with the weather to obliterate all trace of what was once a city. But the action of the canal which has

recently exposed the ancient site is suggestive of what has happened in the past at other places. When their canal began to sink the villagers of Yotkan were compelled to make new arrangements for the irrigation of their land, and this could only be done by tapping the main river at some higher point, and by the consequent lengthening of their canal. Now if the silting up of cultivated land is continually going on, it follows that the supply of water must require frequent readjustment by new canals bringing water from a higher level and from a greater distance. A time must come when cultivation along the banks of the new canals will lead to desertion of land adjoining the old canals, and it is fair to reason that there has existed a general tendency for the oases of Kashgaria gradually to work upstream, leaving deserted settlements behind to be absorbed in the desert. A glance at the map of this part of the world compiled by Dr Stein, and appearing in his book, 'The Ruined Cities of Khotan,' confirms this idea in a remarkable manner. Every one of the places at which Dr Stein discovered buried ruins is to the north of the present road, and downstream from present cultivated areas.

By evening we reached Zawa, the westernmost village of the Khotan oasis. Here there was a long delay in obtaining fresh horses, and it was ten o'clock and pitch-dark when we set forth to cross the thirty-five miles of desert that separated us from Pialma. Remembering previous experiences in the wilderness I inquired about the risk of getting lost, but was assured that the Beg who did courier knew the road with his eyes shut. Nevertheless, when we came to the octroi station outside the village my friend the Beg woke up a row of sleepers with his whip, and ordered one of them to come along and show the way. There was much vehement grumbling, but the written order of the Amban dare not be ignored, and two sleepy rascals joined in—you don't catch a Turki

going anywhere by himself in the dark. In half an hour we were hopelessly lost, and it took us two hours to find the road again. But in the darkness we ran up against Kaptar-Mazar, a place of sanctuary for many thousands of pigeons, kept up by offerings and an allowance from the Chinese authorities. On my way to Khotan, when I heard of the pigeons, I ordered the gun out, having ever in my mind the needs of the pot. But Kallick was horrified at the idea of shooting them, and explained that the pigeons had been there for hundreds of years, and were regarded as sacred.

The story of their origin is interesting. A Mahomedan king, advancing eastward against the Buddhists of Khotan, fought a bloody battle in which thousands were slain on both sides. Needless to say which side won, but when it was all over it was impossible to distinguish dead foes from dead friends. Thereupon a holy warrior lifted up his voice in prayer, and behold! the faithful bodies miraculously collected themselves on one side. Next there appeared two doves, who searched among the dead and picked out the remains of the king, whose burial on the spot created a place sacred for ever after. The holy birds remained and multiplied exceedingly, being abundantly fed by the charity of travellers. Dr Stein states that the Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsiang, who passed through about 650 A.D., relates a similar story of which the heroes are rats. When a great force of Huns were invading the land, and there was no possibility of checking their advance, all the rats in the countryside collected and during the night ate up the harness and leather of the accoutrements of the invaders, thereby effectually stopping their march. The rats were duly sanctified by the people, and carefully cherished as a reward for their services. Hieun-Tsiang describes them as being as big as hedgehogs, with hair of a gold and silver colour, but declares them no longer

visible to the human eye. The spot to which the Chinese pilgrim ascribes the rats corresponds almost exactly to the present location of the pigeons, and suggests how hard dies local legend, with whatever religion its origin may be connected. It also suggests that in Turkestan, as elsewhere, men are mostly liars, though it must be admitted that to change only from rats to pigeons in twelve hundred years argues no unreasonable degree of mendacity.

From the home of the pigeons the road was partially staked, and with occasional wandering from the track we managed to proceed. The two men commandeered did a bolt at the sanctuary, which was foolish, for I had decided to reward them for the loss of their night's rest. The march across the remainder of the desert was very long and wearisome, and broken only by the encountering of two wells, each about 200 feet deep, containing so little water that it is reserved for human drinking only. Crawling along over the endless sand the mind wanders in a manner that makes one tremble for one's sanity. Everything sensible is thought out and exhausted in a very few hours, and thereafter one falls into the way of talking to oneself and imagining the strangest doings. I suppose it was the intolerably slow pace that set me thinking of steeplechasing, and other matters that entailed dash and speed. Mentally I won my first Grand National by a short head after a most desperate finish. The triumphal tittup back to the enclosure, the weighing in and ensuing cheers, were only equalled by the satisfaction of the next Monday's settling. After the successful ride at Aintree I took to lowering the motor-bicycle record between London and Edinburgh. But I soon broke my neck at that game, and returned to chasing. How many more Nationals I won—always by a head, for it is impossible, even in dreams, to forget the handicapper—I cannot now remember, but my career on the turf only ended with

the dawn of day, which showed the trees of Pialma oasis in the distance.

The journey from Pialma to Yarkand is distinguished by much desert and very little oasis. From Guma to Karghalik there are no less than sixty solid miles of sand and gravel, broken only by a few wells and a tank, the latter filled from a distance by a small canal allowed to flow with water one day in each week. It was at the tank caravanserai that I heard there was a Russian officer in occupation. I was indignant to find that this personage had occupied all the rooms for distinguished travellers, and left none for me except those in an outer courtyard. I made a really Anglo-Saxon commotion, and eventually an apartment was emptied and allotted to me. While preparing to turn in during the heat of the day, I was astonished to hear good English spoken outside my door, and on going out to investigate found that the Russian traveller resolved himself into a British officer and a German archæologist. The latter was Dr Von Lecoq of the German Archæological Expedition, and the former Captain Sherer, a gunner from Quetta. After two years of research in Central Asia Dr Lecoq was returning to Europe with thirty boxes of manuscripts and antiquities rescued from the buried ruins of Kuchar. His nearest road lay through Russia, but he wasn't going to risk his precious boxes in the middle of a revolution, and preferred to transport them all the way over the Karakoram Pass to India. Sherer had been shooting in the Pamirs, after which he had visited Kashgar and made the acquaintance of the learned doctor. The two had joined company, and were now *en route* for Khotan prior to setting forth over the mountains.

The pleasure of meeting one's own kind and talking one's own language after nearly two months of abstinence is not a thing to be despised. One reads of the aloofness of the Britisher and his distaste for acknowledging

strangers even in the remotest corners of the globe. But that sort of thing is an affectation entirely of the past, if indeed it ever existed, which I very much doubt. Anyhow there was no ceremony about my new friends, and we had several hours of what to me was soul-satisfying talk. The doctor told me about his finds, and Sherer about the shooting, while I expatiated upon the horrors of the passes they were about to cross. We had lunch and tea together, and then I continued on my way.

CHAPTER XX.

YARKAND.

Owing to a storm that forced us to take shelter during the following night, we reached the Yarkand river after dark, when the boatmen declined to cross. The stream was wide and very fast, and could not be forded at this time of the year. The huge ferry-boats, however, are expeditious and very well handled, so in the morning we crossed without difficulty, horses and all. The river looked really nasty in some places, and the heavy boat rocked ominously, but six lusty fellows poling from the broad stern quickly shoved her out of danger. The seven miles from the river-bank to Yarkand we covered at a canter, and we soon found the Aksakal in the bazaar. As I had hoped, there was a huge bundle of mails for me, and I wasted no time in establishing myself in the quarters prepared by the Aksakal and getting to work on my piles of letters and newspapers. It is worth going through something and being shut off from the outside world for many long weeks in order suddenly to encounter an accumulation of correspondence and news. While escorting me to the garden where I was to live, the Aksakal, Rai Sahib Bhuta Ram, told me he had heard of my approach, and with eighty compatriots had ridden out to the river to meet me the night before. They had all been greatly disappointed at my non-arrival, and would have turned out again in the morning

if they had known I was coming. While sitting in the Aksakal's little house I was besieged by natives of India coming to salaam. They seemed delighted to see a Sahib, and paid me more attention than if I had been a Lieutenant-Governor on his own midden.

It is useless any longer to conceal from the reader that Chinese Turkestan is in some respects a disappointing country. Having now seen Khotan, the most ancient, and Yarkand, the largest city of the New Dominion, I am compelled to admit that there is little of interest to be seen. The chief thing lacking is architecture of any kind whatever. Every building is built of mud, or sun-dried bricks with a mud plastering. A very few houses of hard-burnt bricks are encountered, but even these are quite devoid of architectural pretension. In Yarkand there is a large gateway that once formed the entrance to an important musjid, now disappeared. But this gateway, about fifty feet high, and the tallest building I have yet seen, shows the crudest possible ornamentation and the roughest of workmanship. Nor is there any evidence that in former times matters were much different. The two Chinese pilgrims to whom I have frequently referred certainly write of magnificent buildings at Khotan, but when one recollects that China itself is almost utterly wanting in architectural ambition, it is not difficult to understand that these early travellers were easily impressed, and that height and gaudy colouring were probably sufficient to excite their admiration. At the same time, it is possible that during the Buddhist regime buildings of a more pretentious character existed, but if so their construction must have been of the flimsiest, for not a trace of them remains. Within the limits of known history, which goes back for two thousand years, there is no evidence to show that anything more permanent than mud and wood were employed in even the most important

erections. Stone is procurable in illimitable quantities from the adjacent mountains, and it is proof of the transient nature of the oasis that it is never used. What profit to transport granite and erect a fine building when the encroaching sand or a deflection of the water-supply may one day compel its evacuation? Yet while there has never been any opportunity for the development of architectural art, there is in this very circumstance the implication that the shifting desert which has made permanent buildings impossible conceals priceless relics of the past. These seem unlikely to include the palaces and public buildings that give an air of reality and human interest to history in other parts of the world, but of other forms of art what may not the moving sands cover? So far the surface only has been scratched, and the reward has been rich and significant of a high degree of civilisation. European archæologists have not made Central Asia a hunting-ground without good reason, and it is well within possibility that this region will yet witness discoveries of extreme importance to the fascinating study of the origin of nations.

Yarkand has a population which the most reasonable estimate makes 60,000 souls. On bazaar day every one of these turns out into the streets and mingles with the thousands that come in from outlying districts to trade or make holiday. The dim aisles of the bazaar are packed tight with people, and progress on horseback is almost impossible. They are neither noisy nor drunken, and breaches of the peace seldom occur. But the colour of their clothes, the infinite variety of type, and the verve of the whole scene are things to be remembered. The contrast between the gravity of long-bearded, long-robed, and sanctimonious Hadjis and Mullahs and the gaily clad women, veiled and unveiled, is entirely pleasing to one's æsthetic soul. A decent Mussulman of

mature years is the very epitome of respectability, worthy of being matched in this respect against any cottar of bonny Scotland. It adds to his picturesqueness that he has four wives at home, and that probably ten times as many have passed through his hands in the course of his matrimonial career. What a knowledge of the sex that argues, what a sequence of romances! No wonder that he strokes his beard with an air of comprehending all things, and with the suggestion that he has drunk the cup of human experience to the very dregs.

Down the crowded bazaar comes some petty Chinese official, representative of the dominant race, a figure as important here as the white man in India. He is preceded by horsemen, who clear the road shouting *Khush!* to the well-clad and giving stick to the ragged. The mask-like face of the opium-smoking Celestial, his fine clothing, and his powerful horse are entirely foreign to the scene: he represents another part of the world where there is more character and intelligence than in Turkestan. The Kalendar is another feature of the bazaar. He clears a corner for himself, and then declaims in a loud voice his allegiance to the Almighty; more oft he declares himself in league with Providence; while the people who ignore him are characterised as setting themselves against the Divine will. He makes a fair living, partly owing to his pertinacity and partly because people give him a trifle on the chance that it may stand to their credit in the hereafter. Beggars have their own corners from which they bawl appeals to the charitable in the name of Khoda. They mostly suffer from deformity or disease, and are generally people one would not care to meet in a lonely place or after a St Andrew's dinner.

The bazaar differs little from that of Khotan. The shops are somewhat bigger, and there is more cheap

Russian trash in the way of coloured boxes, looking-glasses, beads, and suchlike. But the *tout ensemble* is exactly the same, from the fruitsellers to the matting that gives grateful shade. In one side-lane I visited a silk-reeling establishment. I had never before seen silk being dealt with in a raw state, so cannot compare the Turkestan methods with those of other countries. But the arrangements here struck me as highly ingenious. From a cauldron of boiling cocoons a man gingerly picked out the protruding ends of the silk and hitched them on to a spinning bobbin worked by a large fly-wheel. How connection is maintained with the threads and the large roll that gradually accumulates upon the axle of the fly-wheel I could not see exactly owing to the dim light and the smell of the cooking cocoons. From the first roll the silk yarn is transferred to successive bobbins, one after the other, drying and becoming clean in the process. In the end there is a huge hank of white or yellow thread, now ready for export or local manufacture. Most of it goes to Andijan in Russian Turkestan, but in years of high prices in Bombay there is a heavy export to India. Last year silk to the value of over 6 lakhs of rupees passed through Ladakh from Khotan to Yarkand. The value of a pony-load of raw silk is something like Rs. 1200. When the cocoons have been boiled and robbed of the results of their labour, they are thrown aside in a heap and allowed to rot. The ensuing stench would make a Chicago meat-packer faint.

Silk and carpet manufacture is a much cleaner and sweeter business. Having seen silk made in several parts of China, particularly in Canton, I was not impressed with the methods or with the results at Yarkand. The workers are given patterns to follow, but their powers of reproduction are very limited, and the results contrast unfavourably with the exquisite

fabrics woven in China. Carpets are made in the same manner as at Gyantse and Khamba Jong in Thibet, but as I do not know how they are produced in the West I can only remark that the process here is slow but effective. Khotan at one time used to be a famous place for carpets, both on account of the fine quality and the beauty of the patterns. But in recent years aniline dyes have been exclusively employed, with the result that colours fade or wear in a very short time. The large Russian demand has also ruined whatever of artistic taste the natives once possessed, and the glaring and inharmoniously coloured carpets now manufactured are both ugly and inferior. I saw some mats made twenty years ago, before the heavy foreign demand had manifested itself, but after the introduction of the aniline dyes. The patterns in these were exquisitely delicate, but here again the colours had all faded. In Khotan it is still possible to get very fine silken carpets made, but only by incessant watching of the work; and having made one carpet, they cannot be trusted to make another the same, either in pattern or quality.

A feature of Yarkand is the number of tanks which adorn it. These are said to be over a hundred, and as they are surrounded by trees and the quaint little balconies of Mahomedan architecture they are certainly picturesque. They are kept full by canals which are occasionally turned on, but there is no outlet, and the water is stagnant. People wash clothes here and pitch in debris of all sorts, with the result that they are nothing but traps for every variety of microbe under the sun. Within the memory of man none of these tanks has ever been cleaned, and if an antiquarian wants a field of operations I recommend the drainage and excavation of one of these city dumping-grounds.

A notable export from Yarkand is *charas*, a narcotic

made from hemp, and identical with the *bhang* of India and the *hashish* of Arabian countries. The resin having been collected is mixed up with the pounded leaves of the plant, the proportion of pounded leaf being the degree of adulteration to which the finished product is subjected. Having been packed in bags of raw hide, and become as solid and heavy as stone, it is ready for export to India. In the Punjab it is in high favour, and does as much damage there as cheap gin does in Whitechapel. Until recently *charas* to the value of 3 lakhs of rupees per annum was exported to India, where a duty of Rs. 2 per seer was imposed on its import. But the Hemp Drugs Commission cast an evil eye on *charas*, with results already discussed. In Turkestan, in consequence of the action of the Indian Government, there was a slump in the commodity, and heavy stocks were spoiling in the hands of the dealers, for *charas* loses all its strength in a year. How well it is that the unrighteous should not always prosper. In Chinese Turkestan *charas* is very popular, and drives a good number of natives to the devil annually. They smoke it with tobacco or have it made up into sweetmeats. There is a small duty on it locally, but not enough to hamper consumption.

Until some years ago India returned the diabolic compliment with interest by exporting to Chinese Turkestan large quantities of opium. But in recent times the increase in 'production of the Chinese article has enabled it to compete with the heavily-taxed Indian product, besides which it is now largely grown in Turkestan itself. And so there is no longer any import of opium from India, a fact to rejoice the pious. The odour of opium-smoking once smelt is absolutely unforgettable. Now and again, while passing through the bazaars of Khotan and Yarkand, I got a familiar whiff, and wondered whether it was less agreeable than the

reek of stale ale which flows from the door of our own simple inn. The Russians won't have *charas*, or opium, or any such things at any price whatever, their import into Russian Turkestan being entirely forbidden. Nor will they have Indian moneylenders—which two prohibitions prove that they mean their native subjects to be moral. Noble Muscovite!

CHAPTER XXI.

KASHGAR.

FROM Yarkand the journey to Kashgar is characteristic of all travelling in Central Asia, little oasis and plenty desert. The distance is about 140 miles, and we covered it in fifty-two hours, arriving at Mr Macartney's house in Kashgar at dark. Altogether we had covered the 380 miles from Khotan in nine days, of which one and a half were spent in Yarkand seeing the sights. Over a hundred hours in the saddle, out of a possible hundred and eighty, is no joke when a man can number grey hairs in his beard, and after three months of solid toil between Simla and Kashgar it was a real joy to enter a civilised household. I had received a letter on the road inviting me to stop with the Macartneys, and when I met with a warm welcome from my host and hostess I felt like spending the rest of my days with them.

The Macartneys have a wing of their house in the garden, and the suite of rooms therein is reserved for travellers. I occupied them with some diffidence when I heard that predecessors had been such as Younghusband, Sven Hedin, Deasy, Stein, besides princes, lords, and others either of high degree or world-wide fame. The first meal with my newly found friends was a dream for a palate long scarified by the atrocities of Kallick. Glass and white linen, silver and a shaded lamp, were table furnishings the existence of which had long passed from

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The Market-place at Kashgar.

The Wall of Kashgar.

my mental ken. A smiling countrywoman at one end of the board and a host with a white collar at the other made me rub my eyes in doubt. But the kindness and attention bestowed upon the travel-stained voyageur soon dissipated his incredulity, and the reality of the situation settled into his soul. Has the reader ever been deprived of potatoes for three months? Childhood and manhood had developed in me for the simple pratie a real affection, which in this last year or two of travel has been augmented to positive adoration. Why, I hardly know, unless it is that I have a brother who has recently gone to live in Ireland. The passionate tenderness for the potato, however, is a living feeling, and when first, after so long a blank, I poised on my fork a new one, small, round, fragrant, and delicate, my emotion could hardly be controlled. Ye dwellers in Egypt, ye know not the sweetnesses of your own fleshpots!

Kashgar has no distinctive features worth recording. It is just the same as Khotan and Yarkand in appearance, while the people dress and talk alike, though perhaps there may be some little variation in type. The goitre, which is so prevalent in Khotan and Yarkand, is seldom seen here, but the people are not so good-looking, particularly the women. This goitre is a curious disease, attributed to the quality of the water, but the cause of which I understand is still a scientific mystery. At first sight the tremendous swelling on the neck is very repulsive, but when every third adult is found to be thus afflicted one becomes accustomed to meeting it. It gives no pain, nor is there any sore upon it, and the objection to it is merely on account of its unsightly appearance and the inconvenience of having—so to speak—a millstone around the neck. The swelling is frequently as large as a melon, and is usually situated in the neighbourhood of Adam's Apple. There is a village near Yarkand where every grown-up person suffers from it, and where it can

truly be said of the inhabitants that they are a stiff-necked and goiterous generation.

Apart from natives Kashgar has a considerable foreign population. The Chinese Tao-tai, or Governor, of Kashgaria has his headquarters here, besides the usual local officials, while the total Chinese number perhaps seven hundred. Next in numerical strength follow natives of India, of whom there are settled about a hundred, including Afghans, who are pleased to class themselves as British subjects for purposes of consular protection. Andijanis and other people from Russian Turkestan are hardly to be counted as foreigners, for they belong to the same race and speak the same language as the natives. Then among Europeans there is the Russian Consul and his office staff, plus a Cossack guard of sixty under a lieutenant. The Russian Custom House is manned by three European officials, and the agency of the Russo-Chinese Bank by a manager and five clerks. A Swedish mission consists of three men and two ladies, shortly to be augmented by reinforcements from Sweden. Finally there are the Macartneys, with governess and two children. Quite a community, though unfortunately, owing to the difference in language, there is not much social intercourse between the Russians and the rest.

Kashgar itself is much smaller than Yarkand, and of much less commercial importance, though politically it is the hub of Kashgaria. The population numbers about 30,000 altogether, so the city is no great matter. Architecture, again, is conspicuous by its almost complete absence, the only buildings worthy of note being the archways fronting some of the musjids.

The European dwellings, however, are neat and comfortable, the gypsum, a substance like plaster-of-Paris, found in the adjacent mountains, proving an excellent substitute for lime plaster. The Yamen is a combination of Chinese style and the local materials, and the

By the River at Kashgar.

architectural effect has no merit beyond that of quaintness.

Chini-Bagh, where the Macartneys live, is situated on the edge of the southern bank of an important branch of the Kizil-su, and commands a fine view of the flats that immediately border the river. Below my quarters was a stretch of melon-beds, in this season densely inhabited by watchers of the ripe and ripening fruit. These careful people live in lattice huts festooned by the yellow-flowered vegetation of the calabash, or gourd. They sleep all day, and render all the night hideous by their hoarse warnings to thieves. Sometimes they lift up their voices in praise, while betimes they sing lewd songs, and curse the wickedness of human nature that compels them to sit up all night to guard their property. The *chowkidars* of this country also attract attention at nights. They go their rounds beating a hollow stick and calling upon the Prophet. If they were seriously after burglars one would imagine they would move silently, but the fact is they themselves are afraid of the darkness, and must make a noise to keep their courage up—it is much better to frighten a thief than to corner him. Other night-birds are the half-witted, who frequent the mazars or burying-grounds, and yell defiance to the Powers of Darkness. At one end of Chini-Bagh is a favourite mazar, and on a spur of loess nearly opposite the windows is another. The latter is now disused, and the earth is slowly subsiding, so that the sides are continually showing skulls and bones of departed sinners.

The river-bank is surely the most interesting place in Kashgar. Here come horses and donkeys and camels to water, and women bring clothes to wash. The *dhobie*, as we know him in India, is also a frequenter of the river-side, and though he has the cruel board that ruins linen, he is a gentle creature, and brings down the uplifted garment with a soft swish that does no harm. For a

copper boys take your nag into the fast stream and are swept down into the shallows, riding astride or standing up on the horse's back. The people are continually fording the river, mostly mounted on some kind of animal. But occasionally there is a little party of women and girls on foot, and then up come all their loose garments, and there is a great view of rounded limbs and satin skin. It is a terrible dilemma for them when they meet a foreigner in midstream, but the desire to keep their clothes dry is generally stronger than the shock to their modesty. Occasionally there is one nag to a father and family who have to cross, and then the little ones sit before and behind their parent, and cling to him like limpets until the danger is past.

Some five miles from old Kashgar is the new city, an institution already mentioned as being characteristic of all the important towns in the country. Here do congregate the majority of the Chinese residents, making for themselves a corner that might be of China itself. This is the fortress that would protect the ruling race in the event of rebellion, but the barracks of the 1200 or so of garrison are outside the walls, and there is little indication that military force is deemed a necessity of the situation. But near the new city is a temple to the glorification of a military hero. Liu Ching-tang was the warrior who reconquered the country from Yakoob Beg and his sons in 1877, and his grateful compatriots have honoured him with a shrine wherein is set the great man's picture—a faded photograph! But they honour his memory in more material fashion, for the sons and relations of the defunct general have the pick of all the appointments in Turkestan, no small concession when it is notorious that they are an opium-smoking, illiterate, ignorant lot. There is nothing remarkable about the temple itself, but upon the wall—built in Chinese fashion across the front of the gateway, to prevent the entrance

A Kashgari Water-carrier loading up.

Family Party crossing the River—see page 226.

***Women wading the River*—see page 226.**

back to the roving blood of his bold forefather. He is a wanderer, else he had never come to Chinese Turkestan. As a ship's steward he saw much of the world, and during his travels took service with a British officer, whom duty eventually brought to Kashgaria. There were two years to be spent in this outlandish country, and John, according to local custom, took unto himself a wife.

Noorhan, her name is, and I saw her every day in the garden cooing and playing with a tiny daughter of the house. She is slim and quick, has large swimming brown eyes, and a drooping mouth that opens easily to let out the flash of white teeth. To my mind she is an exquisite creature, though others say she has high cheek-bones and is afflicted with a wilful and selfish temper. Anyhow, John took her, and the next thing was that her mother was set on a donkey face backward and hunted through the streets by the populace —for John was a Kaffir, and it was a sin for a Mahomedan woman to cleave unto such. John rose up in wrath and went to the Kazi, who awarded damages. Nevertheless, for the sake of domestic peace John embraced Islam, no great hardship, for he admitted that when occasion arose he usually professed the religion of the country in which he happened to be living. But John's master went away, and with him John. Money was left with Noorhan, and promises of return.

John resumed wandering, went to England, and was there made much of by the maids in the houses which his master visited. But his soul hankered after Noorhan, and when he heard of a shooter of big game who was bound for Central Asia, he begged to be taken—and so came once more to Kashgar. Now he is factotum to the Macartneys, and Noorhan serves in the nursery. But the Macartneys take leave to England in a year or two, and then John goes hence, no more to return. He is

Treading Corn at Kashgar.

" . . . they placidly discourse upon philosophy and its bearing upon life, upon theology and its relation to love and being"—see page 229.

saving diligently to provide for Noorhan, who perhaps is secretly rejoiced at the prospect of a change of husband and the immediate expenditure of John's money on a set of golden ornaments. Indeed, I have reason to know that she has no fears for the future.

My host, though already a Chinese scholar, is a great student of Celestial literature, and to him daily comes Wang, a clerk presently out of favour at the Yamen. Under the trees in the garden there is a seat and bench, and every afternoon John makes ready a huge Chinese dictionary and a few volumes of plays or poetry. Wang expounds to his employer with the dignity and assurance that sits so well on the educated Chinaman, though perhaps Wang is not so much of a scholar as his bearing would suggest. They walk under the trees, and placidly discourse upon philosophy and its bearing upon life, upon theology and its relation to love and being—at least that is the impression I receive, for I cannot understand what is said, though I sometimes like to walk with them and listen.

At the tinkle of the tea-bell Wang is visibly enlivened, for he takes readily to the English way of serving the fragrant leaf, and finds the scones and cakes entirely to the taste of his palate. One day he was moved to confession, and related how he had come to be employed in his present occupation of tutor. He was out of work, had no money, and was on the verge of starvation, when he decided to pay a visit to the temple and lay his case before the gods. He did so with much fervour and humility, and was returning through the streets when he met Mr Macartney, who straightway engaged him to come and study every day. Piety brings its reward in Turkestan, as elsewhere.

Having taken it easy for ten days, and discussed Chinese Turkestan until Macartney began to regard me as a nightmare, I took leave of my kind host and hostess

and went to dwell at Shumal Bagh, where I hoped a more Spartan style of living would encourage resumption of work. Shumal Bagh is a garden near the Macartneys, and when I went to see the owner, a Hadji of much sanctity with a full complement of wives and several of children, he said his own family was occupying it, and that he was sorry he could not oblige me. Mentioning my disappointment to Macartney, he sent a servant over to the Hadji to see if matters could not be arranged. The servant, the trusted jemadar of the Agency, has the diplomatic instinct fully developed, for when the Hadji continued obdurate, he marched straight to the Chinese Yamen and pointed out the disgraceful attitude of a man who would not give up his home to a Sahib. The Chinese regarded the matter as treasonable, and sent a myrmidon to turn the obstinate out, neck and crop. Then the jemadar returned in triumph and said the house would be ready for my occupation that evening. Hearing of the arbitrary manner in which the arrangement had been made, I then proceeded to my new house and compromised with the owner—I to have the front rooms and garden, he to retain the back rooms and an orchard at the side.

And so the next morning I found myself established. The entrance was down a shady lane through which flowed a small canal. Then up an alley and in at a gate, and you are within the compound. Two rooms with a large verandah between them served for my own quarters and a kitchen. In front was a small canal circling round the garden and ending in a pond deeply shadowed by trees. Near the pond was a large pavilion with blank sides open to the breeze, and commanding a view over fields beyond. There were flowers and fruit and vegetables galore, and a large field of lucerne which gladdened the souls of two horses that I had recently bought. I breakfasted, lunched, and dined in my

The Horse Market at Kashgar.

Still the Horse Market.

verandah, and sometimes did a little work. But charming surroundings are not the best stimulant to mental labour, for there is no doubt that dead walls and an empty view inspire the finest flights of imagination.

What a man may eat in Kashgar is worthy of description. Breakfast may consist of kidneys, fresh fish from the river, egg and tomato rumble-tumble, honey, butter, cream, and tea or coffee. Lunch may include beef, mutton, pork, chicken, or fish, with any of the puddings that abundant eggs and milk make possible. A sultana-cake at tea-time, and at dinner—this is one of my recent events—

Soup, à la Jardinière.
Fish Pâté.
Beef Olives.
Potatoes, Spinach, French Beans.
Peach and Apricot Tart, with Cream. Calf's-foot Jelly, with Cream.
Grapes, Peaches, Melons, Almonds, Raisins, Pistachio Nuts.
Café Noir. French Rolls.

The ingredients of everything mentioned may be bought in the bazaar, and only the tea and coffee are not indigenous to the country.

Such feeding hardly reads Spartan, but it really was while Kallick was accountable for my cuisine, for he would ruin the simplest of the mercies of Providence. But Kallick one day made free with my loose cash, not for the first time, though I never could be certain, and I packed him off and got rid of his rascally countenance for all time, I hope. It was Saduk Akhun who was responsible for the menu I put before my guests—two French travellers who could not speak English, while I knew no French—and as he is a man with a history, I must describe him. His father and mother were Kashmiris, but he was born in Khotan. He began life with property, but spent it all, and became cook to Macartney

many years ago. He did well for a time, and then began to indulge in *charas*. After a few days' disappearance he would return from his low haunts in the bazaar and challenge everybody to fight. Then being punished for turbulence, he would find a sword and threaten murder. Being dismissed by the Macartneys, he took service with the Russo-Chinese Bank. There he remained for some time, until one particularly outrageous deed resulted in expulsion. Then Stein tried him in the desert, and there he ran amuck and terrorised the whole caravan. For some years he had been scraping a living in Yarkand by keeping opium-dens, *charas* shops, and even less savoury places, when I came along and, ignorant of his character, engaged him. When Kallick fell into disgrace, Saduk Akhun was promoted from the stable to the kitchen, and thereafter I lived on the fat of the land. My French guests declared that they had never dined so well out of Paris, and for myself I had never before known what luxurious living meant. There was the drawback that I had to lie at nights with my finger on the trigger of a loaded rifle, for if Saduk went on the rampage nobody's life was safe.

A Woman of Turkestan.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TURKOMAN AT HOME.

THE native of Chinese Turkestan bears little resemblance to the native of India, either in colour or physiognomy. The ethnography of the Turkoman is a difficult subject, and not over-interesting to those who do not make a special study of such matters. What interests most people in the world is to know how their brothers and sisters in other countries live and look.

In Mahomedan communities opportunities for observation are limited by the seclusion of women and the consequent privacy of home life. When abroad women wear the veil, and a more tantalising obstruction to human sight it would be hard to imagine. Contrary to practice in most Mussulman countries, there is here a good deal of latitude in the use of the veil. A woman comes towards one unveiled, and apparently indifferent to the gaze of a streetful of people; but when she catches sight of the approaching Giaour, up goes her hand and down comes the veil. This objectionable garment is fixed to the front of the cap, and may be thrown backward over the head or allowed to fall over the face. It is made of net, with holes so small that nothing can be seen from outside, but big enough for the lady behind to examine the passer-by accurately and attentively. Thus to be criticised, without the power to return the compliment, is gall and wormwood to the

male Briton not yet reached the age of threescore and ten. Still there are ways of circumventing this unnatural contrivance. One method I discovered by twisting in the saddle and looking backward as I approached an unconscious veil. A sudden turn when within range generally revealed the face of the owner taking a good look at the foreigner when she thought he could not see her. It would be interesting to know, psychologically, why the plain ones dropped their veils instantaneously, while the good-looking ones dwelt long enough for eye and cheek to transmit a thrill.

On the whole the women are handsome, while a few would make Solomon turn in his grave and sigh for a thousand and first. They are as tall as the women in England, and always have black hair hanging down their backs in plaits. Their eyes are black, brown, hazel, green, and grey, and the last colour, with jet eyebrows and a skin like milk, are the kind that are responsible for the breaking of Commandments. They have no figures in Chinese Turkestan, owing to the clothes. These, for a lady, are a long flowing cloak, generally black, lined with green or blue, very graceful, and used for riding or walking abroad. Beneath that is a long-sleeved chemise of coloured silk reaching to the ankles. It is very loose and shapeless, and fits close to the neck, where one side has buttons, to let the wearer in and out. Below the chemise are wide trousers or pyjamas, almost invariably of red cotton print or gaily coloured silk. These two garments are the general wear of a lady in her own home in summer, plus the cloak when she goes out. In winter she duplicates and triplicates each of them indefinitely, all generally being lined with fur or sheepskin, according to her means. For headgear men and women wear a neat little cap of worked silk, of all the colours under the sun. Boots are curious. They are made of soft claret-coloured leather that has all the

Kashgari Girls.

appearance of Russian. These come up to the knee like a man's riding-boot, but have neither heel nor thick sole. But in addition to the boot there is a shoe of strong leather, with sole and high iron-tipped heel, into which the soft-booted foot is thrust when the wearer goes out. The trousers go into the boot for convenience in riding, which is always astride. On horseback a woman looks very attractive, her dainty feet in big stirrups and her flowing robes tucked well around her. I ought to mention that they generally wear a loose streaming piece of white muslin over the head and secured by the cap, and, of course, the inevitable veil, which is very often none too clean. Earrings do not appear to be worn, or much jewellery except rings.

The dress of a man is of the flowing-robe order, and its details are not of much interest. His boots are exactly the same as the women's, the heel of the overshoe not so high or pointed, while the shoes themselves are about four times the size. The women have very tiny feet. The silk cap universal in summer is changed for a variously shaped headgear lined with fur in winter, and sheepskin and fur are added to the clothing. Men always grow a beard when they can, and a long white one is a sign of great respectability. The word Aksakal means greybeard, and has arisen through the custom of giving men of age and dignity the representative offices. The beard is important in etiquette, for when saluting friends and superiors it is stroked with much solemnity. Turkomans are extremely polite, and their manners graceful and attractive. Even the humblest are ceremonious in their intercourse, while social amenities in the shape of dinners, tea-parties, and evening fruit-feasts are freely indulged in by all classes.

The matrimonial relation sits very lightly in Turkestan, as indeed it does in most Mussulman countries, despite the injunctions of the Prophet. Here, however, they are

easier than perhaps in any part of the world. The law allows four wives, and to the letter of it all decent men adhere. But they entirely disregard the spirit by continual change. It is quite usual for an old man of high standing and good reputation to admit to having had thirty or forty different wives in the course of his career. Some men, of course, have so many that they lose count entirely. A considerable proportion of the women have an average of ten husbands during their comparatively brief period of good looks. The marriage ceremony and its preliminaries are similar to those in most Mahomedan communities, and the knot is tied by the Kazi. The woman receives a trousseau from the bridegroom-elect, and various articles of jewellery, of value according to the giver's means, and these remain her property thereafter. Without her consent a wife cannot be taken from one city to another, nor may she be chastised without fault. The husband may not take another wife without her consent, nor must he undertake a journey for six months after marriage. If he then goes travelling, he must leave her money sufficient to live upon for six months. She must be allowed free intercourse with her own family and relations.

Divorce costs threepence. It is only necessary for either party to mention the matter to the Kazi, and he makes out a ticket declaring the marriage dissolved. It takes three months and ten days for a woman to be free to contract a fresh alliance, but the man can reconstitute his harem in forty days. The facility of divorce sometimes leads to interesting procedure on the part of the lady. Having secured clothes, jewellery, and perhaps dowry, she quarrels with her husband and invokes the aid of the Kazi to free her. She now goes off to another city, and after the expiry of the period mentioned makes a new marriage, including further trousseau, jewellery, and dowry. Again she quarrels

A Gentleman and his two Wives.

***A Lady and her unfortunate Baby*—see page 237.**

and divorces, this time removing to a third city with two releases in her pocket. By producing the first letter of divorce she evades the period of waiting and marries at once. The process is repeated *ad infinitum*, and in the course of a few years this interesting madame has accumulated a competence against old age. Now she marries the man of her choice, and lives happily ever after. But to play this game you must have the jet brows, skin of milk, and starry eyes.

When a child is born a lump of sugar is put in its mouth, doubtless to give it a sweet temper. A boy is signalled by feasting, but a girl causes no demonstration. The mother nourishes the child for a few days, after which it goes to a wet-nurse if the family is well-off. That the mother may preserve her figure, a sheep is slaughtered and the still hot skin, prepared with alkali, bound round her body. This remains on for a day and a night after the birth, when it contracts firmly and restores the original slimness of the waist. Until weaned the child is kept in a cradle, where it is fixed so that it cannot roll or move a limb. A hole in the middle of the cradle and bedding obviates the necessity for constant attention, and the baby is only taken out of its bonds at feeding-times. Its head is pressed tightly on a little hard pillow, with the design of keeping the occiput flat. They don't like a bump behind in Turkestan, because it prevents a girl's hair falling gracefully down her back. Boys are circumcised, after consultation of the stars as to the day, before the assembled women of the family, neighbours, and friends, the occasion being celebrated by a feast. Boys and girls go to school kept by the Mullah, at the age of four or five. Boys sit on one side of the room and girls on the other, while the teacher stalks about in the alley between. They learn to read and write and to gabble prayers. At ten the education of the

girls is completed, but the boys go on and may eventually reach the Madrassa, or college, where they are taught theology, law, metaphysics, history, medicine, and other matters as sensible as the Greek and Latin of our own public schools. At the finish their knowledge of things practical is nil.

Caste prejudice is entirely absent in Turkestan, and a man may pursue any vocation he likes without reference to that of his father, and he may marry in circles above or below his own. People eat every sort of food except pork, which is forever unclean in Moslem eyes. They have beef, mutton, fish, and fowl for meat, and eggs and milk and vegetables galore. Rice is much used, but they are also great bread-eaters, and their biscuits are excellent. Ragouts, bouillis, and soups are favourite forms of cooking, while salads, pickles, jelly, syrup, and jam are common. Tea is the universal drink, with sugar but without milk. Milk and cream are much used, and, of course, fruit in season is eaten day and night without ceasing. Alcoholic liquor is seldom drunk, nor is tobacco much used, these milder vices being supplanted by the use of *charas*.

Houses, as already mentioned, are invariably built of mud, generally sun-dried into soft bricks. Wooden beams support corners and ceiling, and the latter is upheld by light cross-pieces covered in with mud. Every room has a chimney much in our own fashion, with chimney-piece and fender. The houses are very rough as a rule, but they are most comfortable in summer, being dark and cool. In winter they are distinctly cold, but with a good fire and plenty of clothes one can be comfortable and cosy. In a country where there is practically no rainfall, the question of building is of course greatly simplified, and a plain mud erection makes a good house. Occasionally there is a burst of rain, and then there is much damage done. But a

bucket of mud and water mends the leakage cheaply and effectively. All houses have little roofed verandahs, on which are spread the large and nicely coloured numdahs of the country. Here sit the women at their sewing during the day, and the men with their cronies in the evening. Trees are everywhere, and the twitter of birds incessant. The Turkis are great musicians and have several instruments, among them the zither, mandolin, cymbal, and flageolet, the last equal to any penny whistle that ever rendered ears a curse. It is said that the women are fine dancers, but as they only perform within their own family circles I was not privileged to witness their skill. One thing that must not be forgotten, and which contrasts strongly with India—the voices of the women are feminine, and not raucous, and it is a pleasure to hear them talking and laughing and singing in dulcet tones. They are much given to playing with their children, and appear to be fond enough of them, though with the frequency of divorce a great deal of separation takes place. Children in this country are like fruit, very easy to come by, and perhaps they are valued accordingly. The little ones are sometimes very pretty, with fair hair and blue eyes, which fade into deeper colours as they grow older.

Besides a good deal of social intercourse, people amuse themselves in a minor degree with chess, draughts, and cards, but they do not gamble, so far as I have heard, like their over-lords, who carry their taste for tempting fortune to extreme lengths in Turkestan. Children have marbles and dice and knucklebones, and play with kites and at rounders. Grown-ups do a little partridge-fighting, but their only active sport is a game called *ulak*, played on horseback. A mounted man with a slaughtered sheep at his saddle-bow dashes off, followed in hot haste by all the players, who try to take the sheep from him. As the Turkomans are often fine horsemen, there is a

lot of lively work, and daring feats are performed in the endeavour to gain possession of the unfortunate sheep. The game ends when the sheep is torn to pieces. It is strange, in a country where horses are plentiful and riding proficient, that there is no racing or polo, particularly as the abundance of sandy ground affords good going. But for the Sport of Kings they told me it was necessary to wait until I reached the mountains, where the Kirghiz keep and train horses specially for flat races of inordinate length.

It can hardly be said of the Turkoman that he is a credit to humanity. He is cheerful and sanguine about the future, peaceful by nature, and fairly honest. But he lacks enterprise and character, and is incorrigibly lazy. On every hand are contrivances for saving labour, and he never walks a yard if he can help it. Even the beggars have each a tiny donkey, with a stomach like a balloon and a voice like a fog-horn, upon which they ride to and from business. The application of water to the ground results in soil of extreme productivity, and if a man cares to work it is easy to become rich, especially in these days when the Russian demand for cotton and silk offer a market for the produce of labour. But our friend only cares to fill his belly, after which he is content to sprawl and watch his wives at house-work. Nor are the better halves more worthy than their masters. To be a woman here is to be a rake, and it is only lack of beauty that prevents perambulation of the world, gratification of the flesh, and a general playing of the devil. Indeed, a handsome woman lives a roaring life in Chinese Turkestan.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PHYSICAL AND HISTORICAL.

CHINESE TURKESTAN may reasonably be described as a country bounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth by a desert. Of the former the best known are the Pamirs, which occupy the south-west corner, and indicate where meet the Empires of China, Russia, and Great Britain. Running due east from the Pamirs are the Karakoram and Kuen Len ranges, the latter inside Chinese territory, and stretching right across Asia almost to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Running north-east from the Pamirs is a series of ranges dividing Chinese and Russian territory, and including the well-known Alai and Thian Shan Mountains. The height of these mountain-ranges is so well known that it is unnecessary to do more than emphasise the fact that their higher levels are covered with eternal snow, from which emanate innumerable glaciers. The level of the Tarim Desert, which bounds the eastern side, is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 3000 feet above the sea. The natural consequence of this combination of great height and adjacent low level is that the mountain systems mentioned drain towards the desert. Strictly speaking, the Tarim Desert reaches right up to the foot of the encircling highland regions, and it is only because of their drainage that Chinese Turkestan exists as a habitable country. Cut off the water that flows from the melting snows, and

in twelve months life and vegetation would completely disappear. The rainfall seldom exceeds two inches in the year, falling chiefly in the months of May and August. So insignificant a quantity upon a sandy soil devoid of vegetation, where humidity is almost non-existent and where the summer heat is of scorching character, is, of course, almost useless from an agricultural point of view.

Chinese Turkestan is thus dependent upon its rivers for irrigation. These rivers are independent of local rainfall, for they flow from the surrounding mountains, whose glaciers and snowfields are unaffected by climatic variations at lower altitudes. Given, then, the heat of summer, and the water-supply for the plains is assured. In many respects Chinese Turkestan resembles the northern part of India, but it possesses the great advantage of being free from the danger of famine, that curse of all countries whose food-supplies are dependent upon the bounty of the clouds. And this difference gives rise to the characteristic feature of the physical aspect of all Turkestan, for the Russian as well as the Chinese portion of Central Asia is governed by similar conditions. Central Asia may be described as one immense desert of sand scored by river-beds. And only where rivers flow is vegetation possible. Thus we have a country of oases surrounded by wilderness. Wherever there is a river its banks are thickly populated and highly cultivated. A large river enables irrigation to be carried inland from its banks for considerable distances, as in the case of the Kizil-zu, which waters the plain of Kashgar. Here we have an oasis about forty miles long and thirty broad, some of the breadth, however, being due to the fact that several small tributaries join the greater river in this neighbourhood. Nothing perhaps will give a clearer idea of the physical aspect of Chinese Turkestan than a statement of the following figures, which show

that the total area of the country is nearly 350,000 square miles, of which only 1¼ per cent is under cultivation, or about 4500 miles, including all the oases down to the smallest, which cover only a few acres. These rich and fertile spots, again, lie in a belt at the feet of the various mountain systems which have been referred to as forming the northern, western, and southern frontiers.

The streams watering Chinese Turkestan flow mostly from the higher of the surrounding mountains. Of these, the Khotan and Yarkand rivers from the Karakoram, Kuen Len, and Pamir mountains, and the Kizil-zu from the Alai, are the best known. All are joined by tributaries of various importance, and, together with minor rivers from the northern frontiers, flow north-east and amalgamate in the Tarim, which loses itself in the marshes of the great inland lake known as Lob Nor. Eastward of the sources of the Khotan river, that portion of the Kuen Len mountains dividing Thibet from Turkestan pours northward numerous streams which lose themselves in the sand of the desert. The same may be said of the mountains from which debouch the large rivers. It is only where a great volume of water is concentrated that a river is formed strong enough to outlast the calls of irrigation, the heat of the sun, and the aridity of the sand through which it flows. One of the marked features of travelling in Chinese Turkestan, then, is the fact that one is continually crossing desert which intervenes between the various oases.

The climate of this curious country is like that of most regions remote from the sea. In summer there is intense heat and in winter great cold. At Kashgar there are recorded temperatures of 104 degrees in summer and 8 degrees below zero in winter, while other parts show still greater cold. Humidity is practically nil, while high wind, raising clouds of dust, prevails for nearly three-

fourths of the year. From May to August the mean maximum is nearly 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and travelling in these months is almost unbearable by day, owing to the accumulated heat of the sand, which, reflected and added to that of the sun, saps the energy of the wayfarer in a manner that is experienced in few other parts of the world. Myriads of flies of every conceivable species render the jungles and marshes adjoining the rivers places of torment during these months, and altogether Chinese Turkestan is far from being desirable in summer. Winter is dry and cold, high wind rendering outdoor life extremely unpleasant. Snow falls sparsely, and seldom remains on the ground for more than a week. Occasionally the winter season passes without any fall taking place. By December all still water is frozen over. Autumn, however, is delightful, for then the wind and dust-storms cease, temperature falls, and air and sky become clear.

Compensation for many of the drawbacks to residence in Chinese Turkestan exist in the prolific nature of the soil and the variety of its products, induced by plentiful irrigation. Fruit is of high quality, and includes many kinds known in Europe. Apricots are most plentiful, and may be picked on the roadside from trees that grow wild. Grapes, peaches, apples, pears, cherries, dates, pomegranates, melons, figs, mulberries, plums, and walnuts abound, while tomatoes, pumpkins, cabbage, beetroot, beans, and many other vegetables, are freely cultivated. Maize, barley, wheat, rice, millet, and peas are among the cereals, while cotton, hemp, tobacco, and the poppy provide crops for commercial purposes. Silk culture is widely carried on, and wool affords material for considerable manufacture.

Eggs, fowls, milk, cream, and curds are universal where there are inhabitants, and the domestic animals are camels, horses, yaks, donkeys, mules, cattle, sheep, and goats. The mountains contain many varieties of big

game, while tigers, wolves, wild cat and wild boar may be encountered in the woods and jungle grass bordering the rivers. Birds of many varieties inhabit the air, but only five different kinds of fish are found in the waters. Tarantulas, scorpions, and centipedes abound on the river-banks, and ticks, gadflys, midges, and mosquitoes are so overwhelming in the jungles that in summer they force even wild animals to take refuge in the desert.

Coming to population, there is an end to all accuracy, for Chinese Turkestan has entirely escaped the censor, and the idea of counting the people is obnoxious to the authorities, owing to the increased revenue that the knowledge of the true numbers might exact from Peking. But from various calculations that have been made by people qualified to form an opinion 1½ million is a fair estimate, and there is no doubt the actual numbers are somewhere between that figure and 1¾ million, though the official Chinese estimate is only 1,200,000. Thus, taking the area of the country at 350,000 square miles, we find that some five people inhabit each square mile. But when it is remembered that the population is concentrated upon 4500 square miles, this proportion needs rectification, and supplies a further illustration of the physical peculiarity of a country inhabited on the oasis principle. In reality there must be 350 people to each square mile, demonstrating most remarkably how rich and fertile is the soil of an oasis in contrast to the absolutely bare and barren ground which surrounds it.

Ninety per cent of the total inhabitants are Turkomans, 3 per cent Mongols, and 2½ per cent Kirghiz. Although the Chinese own and rule the country, the number resident is only 6000, or ·4 per cent, while British Indian subjects number only a few hundreds. Various other varieties of Central Asian natives make up the balance of 50,000. All these people live in oases except some 100,000 nomads, who wander about the grassy foothills

of the great mountain systems, living on their flocks and herds, and occasionally cultivating small patches of cereals. The Turkoman is a rich mixture of the aboriginal inhabitant of this region and the Arab, Mongol, and Chinese conquerors who have overrun it from time to time. The proximity of the once prosperous states of Bokhara, Samarcand, Khokand, Andijan, &c., has also contributed towards the Turkoman blend of blood, and the result is a person of no nationality, and no patriotism except towards that condition of affairs which leaves him well alone.

Chinese Turkestan is a province of a Viceroyalty of China proper, and the part which I have been discussing as bounded by mountains and a desert only represents half of that province. Authority from Peking is delegated to the Viceroy of Shen-kan, who passes it on to the Governor of Hsin-Chiang province at Urumchi, under whom are four Tao-tais. One of these personages is responsible for all that part of Chinese Turkestan which has any connection with India, and under him there is a whole hierarchy of officials who administer the country. Instead of revenue gravitating towards the Chinese exchequer, I understand there is an annual deficit in the budget of the Viceroyalty which includes Turkestan, and that the rest of China has to fork out to keep Shen-kan on its legs. Whether Kashgaria contributes to the deficit or not it is impossible to say. Chinese authority is supported by a large army, composed of cavalry, artillery, and infantry, equal to two divisions of troops. So at least a Russian statistician has placed on record. What numbers are actually paid for by the Chinese Government nobody knows, but it is fairly well understood that the total troops in the country do not exceed 2000. But whatever the strength of the Chinese army of occupation, it appears perfectly adequate for the maintenance of order and the preven-

tion of rebellion. It is generally regarded as impossible for any internal movement to displace Chinese rule, while it is equally well understood that against outward aggression there is no possible defence.

Perusal of the literature relating to this part of the world gives an impression of corruption, robbery, and tyranny that, if it were true, must have resulted long ago in overthrow of Chinese power. The mere fact that China holds the country with a trifling garrison proves that the people on the whole are satisfied with her rule. Books dealing with the subject are mostly in the Russian or English language. Those in Russian naturally magnify the horrors of Chinese oppression, with the view of justifying possible action by Russia in the future. The ordinary British writer, unacquainted with Oriental character and Eastern methods of government, is perhaps the last person in the world qualified to form a just estimate of the system that prevails here. Imbued with the belief that the Anglo-Saxon idea of state management is the most advanced, and indeed the only one worthy of consideration, he can only see in Oriental systems opportunity for disadvantageous comparison. He forgets that the grand object of all government is social content, and that it is menace from outside that is the greatest factor in conducing to internal efficiency. We pride ourselves upon our government, but if it were not a concern run on the latest business lines, from where would come the funds to support army and navy? In other words, we run a highly complex and infinitely practical machine with the object of procuring means for the preserving of our domestic comfort. The Chinese object is precisely the same, and if Chinese government achieves such degree of social equilibrium as satisfies the people by patriarchal methods, what in the world does it matter what the methods are? If the methods were out of line with the temperament of the people, the

people would not be satisfied, and the form of government would be a failure. It is because Chinese methods are not distasteful to the inhabitants that China rules a foreign country and a foreign people practically without any backing of physical force.

The earliest historical references to Chinese Turkestan are to be found in the Annals of the Former Han Dynasty (B.C. 206–A.D. 23), from which it is clear that parts of the region now generally known as Kashgaria were under Chinese protection in the first century B.C. In those Annals mention is made of a variety of imperial officials stationed at a town that Dr Stein identifies as Kashgar, and there are references to the trade which appears to have existed between China and ancient Bactria *viâ* the Turfan road, the northern of the two routes joining China and Turkestan.

The traveller Chang Ch'ien, who made his famous journey in the years B.C. 139-127, gives us an interesting series of glimpses of ancient Kashgar, and indicates that it was a convenient and important emporium for goods designed for transport between the Far East and the Roman Orient. The Chinese hold on Turkestan continued in various forms until early in the second century A.D., and the Annals contain the statement that Buddhism was established for the first time in A.D. 120, information that lacks confirmation from other sources. About the second century A.D. Huns appear to have displaced the Chinese in Kashgaria, though the latter continued to hold the Lob Nor region. Up to the seventh century the country was the scene of considerable religious activity, for there are records of Zoroastrians, Nestorians, and Manicheans, while Buddhism had obtained so strong a hold that Khotan boasted a hundred monasteries. At this period a Thibetan king invaded Kashgaria, and not long after a Mahomedan ruler swept eastward to China, despite which phenomena the Chinese

appear to have continued paramount in Kashgaria. Thereafter nomads of various kinds ruled the country alternately with the Chinese and the Mahomedans until the advent of Genghiz Khan in the twelfth century. That conqueror in his progress westward absorbed Turkestan, and appears to have laid a light rule upon the inhabitants. Tamerlane is the next great name that we encounter, and he seems to have laid waste the land in that thorough and effectual fashion which makes a recrudescence of trouble impossible.

For some centuries we have Kashgaria the scene of religious wars between different sects of Mahomedans, intervals between giving nomads and Chinese the opportunity for a brief spell of power. In connection with this period I note that Sultan Said, a direct descendant of Genghiz Khan, was a great warrior, and that after several successful campaigns he took upon himself to invade Thibet. With 5000 men he succeeded in reaching Lhasa and capturing it. My sympathy with this hero becomes involved when, on the way back, he died of the rarity of the air at the Karakoram Pass. In the middle of the eighteenth century the Chinese asserted their power and obtained a firm footing in Kashgaria, which lasted until early in the nineteenth century. They kept an army of 30,000 or 40,000 men stationed among the big towns, and actually began to contemplate the conquest of the Khanates of Western Turkestan. This ambition appears to have been defeated by a general alliance which included the then Amir of Afghanistan. In 1827 the Khanates took the initiative and occupied the greater part of Kashgaria, until the Chinese in 1830 made peace. Some years later, however, Mahomedan adventurers appeared on the scene, and we have some fearful massacring by both sides, until, in 1857, the Chinese again re-established themselves. In 1861 broke out the great Mahomedan rebellion

in China, and the insurrection soon spread to Kashgaria, the population of which was practically all Mussulman. One by one the Chinese forts fell into the hands of the rebels, until, in 1863, the defenders of the last one, Kashgar, heroically blew themselves up to avoid inevitable capture. The Mahomedans now regained power, and for a few years fought among themselves until the appearance of Yakoob Beg, a notable figure in Central Asian politics, and a personage whose history is worth some attention, both on account of the character of the man and because his doings directly interested the Indian Government.

Yakoob Beg had a humble origin, for his earlier days were spent as a dancing-boy. His sister making a good marriage, however, the youth found himself lifted out of his original surroundings and given a chance in life. And he took it with a vigour that proved the boy a very father to the man. Writing from recollection, Yakoob Khan entered the commissariat service of the Khan of Khokand, and in a short time had proved himself so capable that he was given the command of the forces of that potentate. But the billet was no sinecure, for the moment was that when Russia had got among the Khanates like a fox in a hen-roost. The old-fashioned organisation of a native Turkestan army had no earthly chance against breech-loading rifles, and Khokand was smashed. Yakoob Beg made a stout resistance, and it required a second expedition under the brilliant Skobeleff to give him his quietus.

Reverting to the situation in Kashgaria consequent upon the rebellion of Chinese Mahomedans, I have already remarked upon the position in 1863, when the last of the Chinese garrisons was making a great stand at Kashgar. At this point a notable of Central Asia, called Busruk Khan, came to Kashgar as ruler, with Yakoob Beg as his Commander-in-Chief. Elsewhere

the Chinese had been completely vanquished, and in Yarkand, Khotan, and other cities Mahomedan rulers had arisen, all ambitious of obtaining supreme sovereignty over the country. These upstarts feared that Busruk Khan, with such a doughty henchman as Yakoob Beg at his back, would prove too strong if given time, and so while the Chinese still held out in the citadel they each sent armies to crush the newcomer. Yakoob Beg, with the discernment of a general, took his enemies in detail, smashed the smallest of the armies, and then with his successful troops turned upon his most dangerous opponents, an allied force from Yarkand. The beginning of the battle went against him, but at a critical moment he sent his cavalry round the Yarkandi flank, disorganised the impending attack, and finally routed the enemy. Yakoob Beg is said to have been wounded three times in this fight, and to have concealed his condition lest his men might have been discouraged. Pursuing the defeated army to its base at Yangi Hissar, he soon took that place by storm, thereby making his master supreme in Kashgaria. In remembrance of past favours, he communicated news of his victory to his old employer of Khokand, who had got his head above water again, and was making another struggle against the Russians. Along with letters he sent a present of nine Chinese damsels. But Alim Kul had come into his last inheritance at the hands of the Russians, and never got letters or present. There is no record of what became of the damsels, and it is no use troubling about them now, for they must be well stricken in years.

Yakoob Beg returned to Kashgar, and by means of his great reputation, and no small degree of treachery, gradually pushed Busruk Khan into the background. In 1867 his designs had prospered to such an extent that he was able to declare himself master of all Kashgaria

under the title Khan Bedaulat, or the Fortunate One. Various combinations were made against him, but he crushed them all, and by a series of campaigns greatly extended his borders. It was while at the height of his fame that he became an object of interest both to the Indian and Russian Governments. Those were the days when we were very timid of Russia, and when we looked with much alarm upon her steady and apparently irresistible advance into Central Asia. We were bolstering up Afghanistan on the north-west frontier of India, and it was a question whether it was not worth our while to forestall further Russian movements by entering into an agreement with the Bedaulat. Russia at the same time was in doubt whether to fight Yakoob Beg for his possessions, or to make friends with him. Policy, and the danger of incurring responsibility across the natural boundary of mountains which divides Eastern from Western Turkestan, decided the Russians to abstain from interference with Yakoob Beg. Presumably the Indian Government then dropped all idea of an alliance with the Bedaulat, for when his hour came we had nothing to say in favour of him or his heirs.

But Yakoob Beg, in spite of the energy of his disposition and the strength of his character, suffered from the usual Oriental failings, and these were gradually beginning to find him out. His army was mostly mercenary, and much behind in pay. His rule had been harsh, and his successes marked by cruelty and the confiscation of property. While engaged in victorious campaigns which brought loot to his followers all went well; but when the inevitable Chinese army of reconquest became imminent, he had few real friends among people or troops. His army, bold enough in offence, with nothing to lose and everything to gain, had no heart for defence, coupled with the risk of

Chinese retribution, which heretofore had been entirely Oriental in character. In 1877 the Chinese moved westward on the nearest of Yakoob Beg's posts, which surrendered after a poor defence. Deserters were well received by the Chinese as they advanced, and after several victories the fame of their clemency to the inhabitants spread abroad. This was a new feature in Chinese warfare, for out of policy they treated the people well, and furnished those who belonged to the western cities with money to take them home. Yakoob Beg here made the mistake of trying to shut these people's mouths by murdering them. But instead of preventing the spread of Chinese prestige, this wanton proceeding had the effect of enhancing Chinese reputation and of lowering his own by contrast.

A series of defeats and a crumbling away of his power decided the Bedaulat to put his fate to the touch. He poured out two cups of tea, and in one placed poison. He then went into another room, and ordered a servant to bring him one of the two cups. He drank the tea brought—and died.

The after history of Kashgaria does not present any points of particular interest, beyond the main one which concerns the re-establishment of Chinese dominion. Yakoob Beg's sons quarrelled among themselves and reduced their power of resistance against the Chinese. Yakoob Beg's army failed them time after time, as they failed the army, for they were not made of the same stuff as their father. The Chinese army gained an unbroken series of successes, and finally entered Kashgar in the winter of 1877 without firing a shot. It is interesting to note that great numbers of Mahomedan families, fearing massacre at the hands of the Chinese, fled over the passes into Russian Turkestan. The month being December and the temperature zero, many perished by the way but all who

succeeded in crossing the border were saved by the admirable arrangements made for their relief by the Russians. The flight of these unfortunate people, however, was quite unnecessary, for the Chinese forbore to wreak vengeance, and their restraint then doubtless has had much to do with the peaceful and undisturbed position they have enjoyed in Turkestan ever since.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC.

THE politics of Kashgaria, the modern name for the Chinese colony in Turkestan, are simple in comparison with those of states in most parts of the world. China leaves its distant dependency to do very much as it wishes, and its wishes are extremely limited in extent. Indeed, the rulers of Kashgaria have no other object in life than the preservation of the *status quo*, and the presentation to outside pressure of that inertia which is at once the glory and the curse of Celestial character. With India there are practically no differences, and with Russia Kashgaria has no quarrel. The Lion in the south and the Bear in the north are almost indifferent to the gentle and placid lamb whose fold is walled by the mighty segment of mountains that commences on the Thibetan border and runs west, then curls north and east, and finally dwindles away into the Siberian steppes. 'Tis a snug corner of the world, all the snugger because it is not worth invading.

Nevertheless, Kashgar has its atmosphere of political rivalry, and upon its rustic stage are fought no mean battles. Diplomatically, Kashgaria is very new, for only in quite recent times have its neighbours deigned to take an interest in its existence. Rather, perhaps, it should be said that it is only on account of recent territorial expansion that the expediency of appointing agents has

become apparent to Russia and to ourselves. To understand the situation to-day, it is necessary to devote a little attention to the sequence of events that has resulted in Russian and British interests coming into contact.

The earliest connection of European countries with Eastern Turkestan dates from 1851, when the Russian advance into Central Asia gave rise to the Convention of Kuldja between Russia and China. Under that Convention Russia acquired the right to consular representation at Ili. In 1860 the Treaty of Peking opened Kashgar to Russian trade, and ceded land for buildings, churches, cemeteries, and pasturage. A Russian Embassy visited Yakoob Beg in 1872, and concluded a commercial treaty which admitted Russian goods into Eastern Turkestan at a duty of 2½ per cent *ad valorem*. Here it must be noted that when the great Mahomedan rebellion overthrew Chinese dominion in Turkestan, the Russians advanced and occupied the beautiful and fertile province of Ili (1871) for the purpose of quelling the prevailing disorder. They agreed to evacuate, however, when China re-established order in Central Asia. This having been effected by the Chinese reconquest in 1878, Russia was requested to withdraw from Ili. But Ili had proved sweet to dwell in, and it was only after protracted discussion, and the refusal of the Chinese to ratify the Treaty of Lavidia, that in 1881 Marquis Tseng signed the Treaty of St Petersburg, which left Russia in part possession of the province in dispute, and gave Russia the right to establish consuls at Kashgar and various other places. Further, the 2½ per cent duty on Russian goods, imposed under the agreement with Yakoob Beg, was cancelled, and free admission granted to Russian goods and traders. The arrangement was to hold for periods of ten years, when either party might denounce it by giving six months' notice.

In 1884 General Medinsky and Sa Ta-jen exchanged

a protocol regarding the boundary between Ferghana and the district of Kashgar. According to the protocol, a triangular piece of territory in the Pamirs was to be unclaimed on both sides.

In 1891 Colonel Yonoff was despatched by the Russian Government to the Pamirs with a body of troops whose ostensible object, to shoot *Ovis poli*, earned it the sobriquet of the Hunting Detachment. The real object was to make a demonstration, turn out Afghan or Chinese posts, and generally annex the district in view of the forthcoming diplomatic settlement of frontier disputes pending between ourselves and Russia. The Chinese, hearing of this expedition, sent a small body of troops to Somatash to assert their claims. On being requested by Yonoff to withdraw, the Chinese complied with an alacrity they do not usually display. Yonoff then retired, whereupon the Chinese returned and began to build a fort. This brought the Afghans, who also claimed rights, upon the scene, and again the Chinese gave way. In 1892 Yonoff repeated his promenade of the previous year, and turned two Chinese posts off the Pamirs. But when he came to Somatash he found the Afghans obdurate, and a fight ensuing, fifteen out of the seventeen men holding the post were killed. In September of the same year the Russian Government ordered Yonoff to withdraw, and he is supposed to have done so; but it remains that the Russian scheme was successful, and that they have now managed to legalise their position at points previously agreed to be within no man's land. The boundary between Eastern and Western Turkestan in the Pamirs has never been settled by treaty, but there exists an understanding that the frontier is delimited by the watershed dividing the sources of the Oxus from that of the Taghdumbash branch of the Yarkand river.

British connection with Eastern Turkestan is less exciting. An Indian civilian named Shaw was the first

foreigner to visit Kashgar since the rise of Yakoob Beg, which monarch gave him a kind reception, and sent an envoy back to India with him in 1869. In the following year the first British mission proceeded to Yarkand (Forsyth, Shaw, and Henderson), but the king being absent in the north fighting with Tunganis, the mission returned without having seen him. It was this move on our part that prompted the Russian embassy of 1872. When Yakoob Beg was victorious, he returned to Kashgar, and one of his first acts was to send another envoy to India with letters to the Queen and the Viceroy. The envoy having discussed measures for the development of trade proceeded to Constantinople, where the Sultan bestowed on his master the title of Amir-ul-Muminin. Returning to India, the envoy joined the Forsyth Mission, which in 1873 proceeded to Kashgar and concluded a commercial agreement with the Amir. Various reasons delayed ratification until 1876, when an envoy from the Amir reached Simla. In 1877 the question of establishing a permanent agent at Kashgar was under discussion, when the death of the Amir caused indefinite postponement of the matter. The subsequent return of the Chinese cancelled all arrangements made with Yakoob Beg, who was regarded all through by the Chinese as a rebel.

In 1891 Captain, now Sir Francis, Younghusband, was sent to Chinese Turkestan on a special mission, the purpose of which has never been made public. But it is not difficult to see that the contemplated Hunza-Nagar Expedition, which was successfully concluded in the following year, made it desirable that we should arrive at some understanding with the Chinese in regard to boundaries in the neighbourhood of the Pamirs. This movement on our part is supposed to have been at the bottom of the ensuing Russian activity in that region, already mentioned as inaugurated under Yonoff. Younghusband's

position at Kashgar, while Yonoff was prancing about on the Pamirs, was far from happy, for the Chinese were hostile to the proposals of the Indian Government, and the Russian Consul was able to spoke our wheel at every turn.

The Younghusband expedition, however, was not without fruit. With it had come a young official previously employed by the Indian Political Department to act on the Sikhim border as an intermediary with the Chinese in the Chumbi Valley. Macartney's knowledge of the Chinese language made him indispensable to the discussion of affairs, and when Younghusband returned to India he remained at Kashgar on special duty. The Russians did their best to get him turned out, but he managed to stick on, and in 1893 was ordered to remain permanently in Chinese Turkestan, with the ponderous title of "Special Assistant for Chinese Affairs to the Resident in Kashmir." After nearly ten years in the country, during which he had no official position, the British Government gazetted Macartney Consul at Kashgar, an appointment the Chinese refused to ratify, on the ground that we were entitled to consular representation only at such places in China as are agreed upon by treaty. We seem to have been rather precipitate in making the appointment without the acquiescence of the Chinese Government, and the Russian Minister, then paramount at Peking, was able to secure defeat of our intention to give Macartney proper standing. Russian Ministers at Peking, however, are not now so strong as they used to be, and doubtless, when more important matters at issue between ourselves and China have been settled, the question of our representation at Kashgar will be satisfactorily arranged.

The treaty of 1881 secures for Russia free trade with Kashgaria, thereby rendering exempt from *likin* goods in the possession of Russian subjects. This *likin* tax, which was universally imposed upon commerce in Chinese ter-

ritory until quite recently, was never very heavy in Turkestan, but it had the defect of being a variable impost, regulated by the ability of merchants to pay and officials to exact. Until the establishment of our agent at Kashgar British trade was handicapped, as compared with Russian, by this tax, which was imposed on goods in transit from town to town. In 1893, however, an Indian trader decided to make use of the British official who appeared to take so much interest in his welfare, and whose inquiries into the course of trade were so minute. He complained that he had been heavily overcharged, and asked Macartney to represent his case. Macartney applied for a schedule of the *likin* rates, which was not forthcoming. Pressure elicited replies which gave colour to the belief that there were no fixed rates, whereupon the disability under which British trade laboured, and the disadvantage to commerce in general, were represented, with the astonishing result that the Chinese totally abolished the *likin* tax. This decision had the result of placing British trade on an entire equality with Russian, and amounted in a small way to a triumph for British diplomacy. The *likin* tax gave our agent still another opportunity to prove his mettle.

The financial obligations incurred by the Chinese Government in consequence of the Boxer outbreak in 1900 led to retrenchment and increase of taxes. It was decided to reimpose *likin* in Turkestan, and as we were treatyless there again arose a condition of affairs under which our trade was placed at a disadvantage. Russia, in virtue of the treaty of '81, continued as heretofore to enjoy free trade. Vigorous representations from Kashgar ensued, our Minister at Peking hardened his heart, and the result was that British subjects and goods were placed on an equal footing with Russian. Bigger things were happening in Manchuria at the time, and Russia in that region was overriding the interests of all concerned, and

could afford to let minor matters go past. But it was bitter work for the smaller men who had no finger in the Manchurian pie.

The *likin* proclamation, however, remains in force, with the curious result that Chinese subjects in Kashgaria must pay, while those of Russia and ourselves escape. That foreigners should be allowed to trade free of tax in a country where the natives are mulcted is surely one of the strangest anomalies that ever existed in commercial regulation. It is extraordinary that the Chinese acquiesce in such an arrangement, but the truth is that the officials share in all the money that is collected, and are not anxious to take any steps which might diminish their opportunities. In 1911 China has the right to denounce the Russian treaty, and doubtless then endeavours will be made to equalise matters for all concerned.

Apart from its strategic significance, what interests us most in Kashgaria is its value from a commercial point of view. It is hard to say how ancient is the trade between India and the region now known as Chinese Turkestan, but it seems fair to assume that the expeditious journeys made by Chinese pilgrims in the early centuries of our era, of which there is accurate record, were made possible only because the routes were already open and well known to traders. Figures, of course, are entirely lacking, and, so far as I am aware, no statistical record of the trade was made before that compiled by Major Cunningham about the year 1850. His figures show very small values, but suggest that in bulk the quantities exchanged fifty years ago were very much the same as those of present times. Tea, tobacco, and *charas* were the important items of export from Kashgaria, and opium, shawls, and brocades the leading imports from India. A curious feature of the trade used to be the import of considerable quantities of coarse Kashmir sugar and its return to the country of

origin in the shape of fine white sugar-candy. Considering that the operation included 100 days' transport on the back of pack-horses, it must be assumed that the ultimate price of the candy was enormous.

Recent statistics show a remarkable revolution in the nature of the commodities passing between Kashgaria and India. Of the exports to India, tea and tobacco together used to represent 80 per cent of the total, while to-day not an ounce of either figures in the trade returns. Of the imports from India, opium and shawls predominated to the extent of three-quarters of the total, yet now both items have completely disappeared from the statistics. Needless to say, Kashmir has become too sophisticated to import its candy from the centre of Asia, and, perhaps, cares no longer for so simple a luxury. Cotton and silk goods are now the important items of import from India, and these, with many articles in minor quantity, total an average value of about Rs. 10,00,000. Exports to India are chiefly *charas* and raw silk, which, with other things, generally balance the imports in value.

The trade route between India and Kashgaria is one of the most extraordinary in the world. It crosses four passes 18,000 feet above sea-level, several glaciers, rushing rivers, and mountain-torrents innumerable. Food for man and horse, and fuel for firing, must be carried over one section measuring 200 miles long. For weeks on end it passes through districts entirely without human habitation, and where mountains and valleys are bare even of the humblest vegetation. For 400 miles the route traverses regions above the fuel-line, which occurs at a height of 14,000 feet above sea-level. This unspeakably desolate, but inconceivably grand and impressive, tract of country is marked by one long white line stretching for ever in front of the traveller. Alternately surmounting passes of the Himalayan, Karakoram, and Kuen Len mountains, the three highest ranges in the world, it con-

tinues to indicate the road towards the plains of Central Asia, and ceases only when lower altitudes are reached and nature once more begins to smile from the landscape. Standing in some pass commanding a long valley the streak lies broad, clear, and white before one, glistening on the yellow sand as distinctly as a chalk-mark on a tennis lawn. Death has drawn this horrid guiding-line, in record of suffering that has been endured and of tragedy that has been enacted in those ghastly and lonely solitudes. The victims belong only to the brute creation, and perhaps it does not matter that they have suffered the extreme agony in order to profit mankind. But the horse is a good friend to man, and one cannot think of his sweet temper and willing disposition without being moved at the sight of his whitened bones strewing the way, each little heap telling a tale of over-work, exhaustion, and desertion. In one pass I counted ninety dead animals, most of which had succumbed to exhaustion, but some of which had fallen on the glacier and broken limbs or back. Several times I took to counting the skeletons on the road, with the object of estimating the number, and I came to the conclusion that there cannot be less than the remains of 5000 horses fringing the tract across this inhospitable region. The annual mortality varies between 200 and 300, due to a combination of causes. The rarefied air kills a proportion, and the trader argues that if he is going to lose an animal it may as well be a cheap one. So we have inferior beasts, under-feeding, and over-loading, and the natural consequence of death from exhaustion. The cost of transporting a load of about 2 cwts. from Yarkand to the plains of India is some Rs. 100, and as the animal to do the work may be bought in Turkestan for Rs. 60 or 70, it does not matter if many are lost by the way. The Asiatic knows no pity. The skeletons on the road doubtless represent the mortality of many years, but it is the case, however, that

the great ravens, vultures, wolves, marmots, and other creatures who live upon carrion, are quite unequal to the task of scavenging the road. I saw many horses recently dead that had not been touched, and most of the vultures we saw were so gorged they could hardly move. It has been my disagreeable experience to see the veldt in South Africa dotted with dead horses, and the plains of Manchuria covered with the corpses of men, but no scene of slaughter has ever struck me as being so pitiable as this, suggesting as it does such an appalling amount of silent suffering. Death coming quickly is a fate with which nobody need quarrel, and in war animals must take their chance with men. But here it is a cold-blooded succession of over-exertion, starvation, and complete exhaustion that kills these poor brutes, and whether practical measures for alleviation of their lot are possible or not, it remains that the whole business is entirely revolting to one's sense of humanity.

Since the extension of the Russian railway system into Central Asia, there has been a considerable decline in Indian trade with Kashgaria. As compared with the journey from India to Yarkand, the severe and expensive character of which I have indicated, Russian trade is handicapped by a land journey of only twenty-one days. From Andijan, the terminus of the railway, the trade route proceeds through easy country, and encounters only one pass that presents a serious obstacle to the transport of merchandise. The elevation reaches only 12,000 feet, and forage for horses and food for man are obtainable at every stage. Other things being equal, the transport rates alone would be quite sufficient to turn the scale in favour of goods from Russia. But not content with their natural advantages, the Russians, on cotton, sugar, and kerosene, give a drawback on exportations equivalent to the cost of carriage on those goods from Russia proper. Naturally British goods have suffered in competition,

and the marvel is that we have retained any trade at all.

Since the opening of the railway, Russian trade returns show an advance from £350,000 in 1896 to £580,000 in 1904, including exports and imports. The principal items of export to Russia are wool, carpets, raw cotton, and coarse-manufactured cotton, and of import from Russia, cotton tissues, sugar, and kerosene. In 1904, raw cotton worth £70,000, and coarse-manufactured cotton worth £150,000, crossed the Russian frontier, these two items amounting to three-fourths of the total. In 1905 these figures dropped from £220,000 to £95,000. Altogether, there was a decrease in the total Russian trade of nearly £200,000. The Russian Consul attributes the falling off to the disturbed condition of Russia, but the fact is that the Chinese authorities became alarmed at the increase of cotton cultivation, and put a limit to it for fear of an agricultural crisis. In consequence the exports to Russia were diminished as stated, and the native purchasing power having declined, there was a corresponding drop in import of Russian goods. This illustrates very clearly an important economic condition of Kashgaria. The area under cultivation suffices to support the population, and the margin for export is extremely small. Whenever cultivation with a view to export is increased, food-supply is endangered, and a reversion to cereals becomes imperative. There is, in fact, a distinct limit to the purchasing power of Kashgaria, and it is now realised that the prospects of business are not nearly so promising as the figures of 1904 suggested.

Russia, however, is intent on making the most of her proximity to Kashgaria, and has taken various measures to promote growth in commercial relations. A branch of the Russo-Chinese Bank established at Kashgar stimulates and assists traders in Russian commodities, a

custom-house at Kashgar simplifies the payment of duty and the examination of goods at the frontier, while the system of drawbacks already mentioned obviates the heavy transport charges from distant Russia. Another important step has recently been taken by our rivals.

Of the total Russian trade with Kashgaria, 99 per cent passes over the Terek Pass, a gap in the mountains most difficult of negotiation owing to the presence of a glacier and the continual occurrence of snowstorms. For seven months of the year I understand that this route is closed altogether, and that a neighbouring pass is almost equally impassable. Pack transport, of course, is employed. But 150 miles to the north-east lies the Turgat Pass, open nearly all the year round. On the Russian side of the mountains there is a road from Narin leading to the top of the pass, and it is only the fact that the Chinese side is extremely difficult that prevents this being used as the trade route. But while I was at Kashgar last year, the Russians concluded an agreement whereby they were to lend the Chinese a large sum of money, free of interest, to be expended upon the construction of a road from Kashgar to link up with the Russian road at the top of the Turgat. When completed there will be a road *open to wheeled traffic* connecting Kashgar with the Russian railhead, and another blow will be struck at the remnant of British trade. While I was at Kashgar a Russian engineer officer had arrived to direct operations, and a Chinese official with a complete staff had been deputed to commence work. A Russian carrying company, I understand, has contracted to inaugurate a transport service whenever the road is ready. As there is a reasonable probability that Narin will be joined to Tashkent by rail before very long, there is in prospect a still further diminution in the difficulties of transport. Nor must it be forgotten that the opening up of the Narin route brings Kashgaria into touch with Simerechia, the

one province of Turkestan wherein Russian settlers thrive, and where wheat and other cereals can be grown in great quantity. At present Kashgaria cannot procure food if her own supplies fail, but if grain from Simerechia becomes available, her agriculturists might devote themselves to cotton cultivation without fear of starvation—all for the benefit of Russia.

We, on the other hand, have done nothing to improve roads beyond a particular zone, nor have we asked the Chinese to do anything on their side. The strategic key to Kashmir and Ladakh is the Saser Pass, and beyond it, I understand, military policy of twenty years ago declared that the more difficult was the route the more safe was our frontier. But these are old-fashioned reasons, and it is surely incumbent on the Indian military authorities to reconsider their views, and if possible remove their embargo against improvement of the trade route. Having made such concessions to Russia, the Chinese could hardly decline to do something for the Indian road, and it is quite certain that comparatively limited expenditure would effect improvement that would materially simplify transport. We cannot hope to compete with Russia in the north of Kashgaria, but there are regions to the south-east where India is not so greatly handicapped by distance, and with which we might still do profitable business if encouragement were provided.

It was all *dolce far niente* with me in Kashgar, but not so with our Agent. His mornings were busily occupied with the multifarious tasks that fall to the lot of the official representative of a foreign country. The native of India loves to make somebody a father and mother, to raise up for himself a friend and comforter who will listen to his sorrows and redress his wrongs. "Protector of the poor" is the title which he likes best to bestow upon his ruler, and it seemed to me that the few hundred subjects of the Sirkar settled in Kashgaria

wanted fathering and mothering to an embarrassing extent. An individual would come and fall weeping on the ground. Being ordered by the jemadar to rise, he would relate his tale of woe, listen to the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of the Sahib, and depart with gladness and cheerfulness in his heart, for had he not shifted the responsibility for the waywardness of things? But sometimes would come a strenuous complaint of wrong and injustice against some evil-doer. All the parties would be warned for the following morning, and in due course the culprit would creep into the compound, guilt written upon his face. The facts would soon come out, a fine would be levied on the spot, or the award might be a beating, which was there and then administered in open court. The law's delay is unknown in the British Agency at Kashgar, there is no variety of courts to choose from, no fees to pay, no vakeels or pleaders to involve the issue, nor are police required to arraign offenders or to execute the decrees of the law. There is, indeed, no law; only equity interpreted by one just man, in whom all believe and trust, truly an Arcadian condition of affairs.

And so, though our representative has no official status, he is not without influence, and in these days of lost Russian prestige in Asia he is probably just as strong as the Consul of our great rival in the Orient. It is difficult to avoid alluding to Russia in this manner, for in Central Asia our relations are one of the great subjects of conversation, and evidence of rivalry is continually cropping up before the traveller. One of the most curious items of this evidence is the case of a newspaper which arose in Kashgar at the time of the Boer War. It was financed by the Russian Consulate, which provided it with a European press version of occurrences in South Africa. Appearing in the Turki and Chinese languages, it painted in lurid colours the

horrors perpetrated by our soldiers and the iniquities of our Government, and prophesied in exultant terms the early downfall of the British Empire. With the end of the war publication ceased, and the name of the Sirkar is still a power in Asia. I twitted Macartney with laggardliness in not starting a paper in our interests to record the progress of the Russo-Japanese War. But he smiled, and said that the Chinese took care that all Central Asia knew what was happening.

Prior to the war in Manchuria the Russians were all-powerful in Kashgaria, their wishes were law, and the fear of them kept the Chinese from sleeping o' nights. Now the Chinese sleep comfortably, and no more fear the Russians than we fear the Theosophists, or the Christian Scientists, or the passive resisters, or any other illogical but harmless people. Some years ago it was one of the accepted probabilities of political development that Russia's next step in Central Asia would be the absorption of Chinese Turkestan. Certainly the Chinese were quite powerless to resist aggression, as they still are. But now the integrity of the Chinese Empire is powerfully guaranteed, and one of the remotest of contingencies is its violation at a point where there is so little to gain, for after all Kashgaria is a thoroughly unprofitable country. If Russia ever did tempt Fortune in this direction, it could hardly be for any but strategic reasons. Russia on the Kashmir and Thibetan borders would not suit us at all, and our voice, and perhaps our arms, would be raised in emphatic protest if she tried to displace the Chinese in Kashgaria.

Our happy relations with the Chinese in this part of the world are due greatly to our Agent, who has built up for himself a strong position. British prestige has been well maintained, for although our Government has never pushed the matter of our official representation at Kashgar, they have not omitted to support the Agent

in time of need. Macartney's knowledge of Chinese language and character have enabled him to maintain personal relations at times of official stress, thereby tiding over difficulties that might have had unpleasant consequences. There have been moments of diplomatic check, but from all I can gather the various difficulties that have arisen have merely been the means of creating remedies against their recurrence, and of establishing rights that had been previously denied.

An affair that occurred during my stay in Kashgar illustrates a condition of this country that it is well should be understood, and which proves that it is necessary for us to have an agent both wide-awake and firm. A serai in the city recently changed hands, and the new owner, being desirous of getting rid of some Hindu occupants, thought to effect his purpose cheaply and expeditiously by hanging before the Hindu doors a number of skins still dripping with the gore of the cows from which they were taken. The cow being sacred in Hindu eyes, this procedure amounted to the deepest insult, and the sufferers immediately paraded before Macartney and unfolded their tale of woe. It was impossible for them to tolerate such outrage and blasphemy, and if the hides were not withdrawn they must leave the serai. But they held leases of their quarters, which had still four months to run, and for which they had paid rent, besides which it is the custom of this country that people taking rooms in a serai shall be entitled to continuous renewal of leases provided they pay regularly. Here, then, was a case in which the religious prejudices of British subjects were being utilised to rob them.

The Chinese munshi attached to the Agency was ordered to proceed to the office of the local magistrate and to request that the obnoxious skins should be taken down. But the magistrate was sick and could not be

seen. So the skins continued to drip before the demented Hindus, to the delight of the mob, which was overjoyed to witness the discomfiture of the idolater. Next day the munshi went again to the magistrate, but again had to return without satisfaction. The town was now deeply interested in the situation, and there were rumours of trouble. British prestige was at stake, and if the skins remained hanging it meant that our influence with the Chinese was nil—in fact, that the Chinese did not care what happened to the Hindus. So Macartney girded on his sword and, escorted by riders, went to call upon the magistrate. That worthy was still sick. Next the Commissioner of the district was visited, but he was out. There was only one more, the Tao-tai, or Governor of the province, and he Macartney bearded in his Yamen. Obviously the Chinese had been squared by the new owner of the caravanserai, and they meant to give that rascal a good run for his money. The Tao-tai showed no sympathy with the Hindus at the beginning of the conversation, but after some plain talking, the precise wording of which is a State secret, he collapsed, and the skins were ordered to be taken down. The same evening there was a large parade of Hindus in Macartney's compound, and he was publicly thanked for his intercession. It was a British victory of considerable importance. Hindus are not favourites in this Mussulman community, for other as well as religious reasons, of which more to follow. Indeed it is not too much to say that their position is precarious, and that any relaxation of public order might result in scenes similar to those recently enacted in the Jewish quarters of Russian towns. There were indications that in this instance the Chinese sided with their own subjects. If Macartney had failed to force the Tao-tai to comply with his request, it would have been equivalent to official sanction to the mob, the consequences to the Hindus

throughout the country would have been dire, and the lowering of British prestige serious. Indeed all the position that Macartney has slowly and laboriously built up for himself as his country's representative was at stake, and might have been swept away in a moment if he had not perceived the seriousness of the situation and acted with firmness.

One of the evils of this country is the Hindu money-lender. We know enough of him in India to understand that he is far from being a desirable member of society. So they think in Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan, from which happy hunting-grounds, I understand, he has been ejected by law. In Siam and Indo-China he is also regarded as a public pest, and the French would greatly like to get rid of him if the matter could be arranged without hurting British pride. Here there are about 500 Shikarpuris who exist by usury, encouraging thriftlessness and grinding the noses of the people. Their methods are so simple and the scale of their operations so small that they seldom come in contact with the law, which might be used for their restraint. They attend bazaar days in towns and villages all over the country, and lend sums varying between four annas and five rupees to merchants and others who are temporarily pressed. They exact interest usually at the rate of 12 per cent every bazaar day, so that in eight weeks they have recovered their capital, and are still creditors for the original sum. In other words, they transact business at a profit of something like 600 per cent per annum. When these people apply to Macartney for assistance in recovering debts they get precious little encouragement, one is glad to know. In the days of Yakoob Beg the Hindu was treated with great harshness, compelled to wear particular garments, and to go uncovered in the bazaar. Under free Chinese institutions, however, he has got his head above water, and

now lords it equally with his Mussulman enemy. In most small places he has contrived to get the local Begs under his thumb, and there are instances where even the Chinese Amban has come under his control. Nevertheless the Hindu sits for ever on the top of a volcano, and if the Chinese for a moment showed that they were indifferent to British claims for rights and protection he would be liable to be torn to pieces by a combination of involved debtors and religious fanatics. In view of such a possibility alone it is desirable that the question of our consular representation should be speedily settled, and a proper guard sent to Kashgar.

An interesting event in the recent history of Kashgaria has been the abolition of slavery. Until our appointment of a political agent to Gilgit the neighbouring Kanjut country, presided over by the Mir of Hunza, was the home of a race of ruffians who lived by murder and plunder. Their special delight was to pounce upon caravans crossing the Karakoram mountains to and from Leh, looting the merchandise, and selling such of the merchants into slavery as were not able to redeem themselves. All the small states in their neighbourhood had suffered severely from these rascals since time immemorial, and the logical consequence of the extension of our influence to Gilgit was the rooting out of this nest of robbers. The expedition of 1891-92 resulted in our capture of the two strongholds of the Kanjutis, and the addition of Hunza-Nagar to the Indian Empire. But in Chinese Turkestan there existed in the shape of slaves some 5000 or 6000 victims of Kanjut depredations. These for many years past had been periodically sold into bondage at Yarkand, whence they were distributed all over the country. Their usual selling price was a *yambu* of silver, equal to about £10. Except that their liberty was curtailed, the lot of these people was not unhappy, and they had the opportunity to accumulate

money and purchase release. Many, however, lacked the intelligence and enterprise to help themselves, and remained slaves all their lives, their children also being born into slavery.

After the capture of the Hunza fort Colonel Durand, who led the expedition, was requested to obtain the release of some Kashmiris who had been captured by the Kanjutis and sold as slaves some years previously. Durand wrote to Macartney on the subject, and eventually the Chinese authorities produced the men, and they were returned to India. The whole matter then came under consideration, and the Kashmir Durbar voted Rs. 50,000 to be expended in procuring the liberty of Kashmiris held as slaves in Chinese Turkestan.

Our Agent at Kashgar consulted the Chinese, who ordered the assemblage of the slaves in the Yarkand district. They arrived by hundreds, and the task of picking out those with claims as Kashmiri subjects became difficult and invidious. Eventually some hundreds were set at liberty at an expense of Rs. 600 to Kashmir, and considerable expenditure on the part of the Chinese. The then Amban of Yarkand was a person of some piety, and he professed himself greatly envious of the blessings in the next world which Macartney was procuring for himself by this good work. In order to share them he suddenly issued a proclamation declaring that slavery was abolished in his district, and that all slaves were to be released immediately. The outcome of this act was that all the other Ambans followed suit, and finally the Tao-tai, or Governor, procured the issue of an Imperial Edict confirming and applauding what had been done. Some of the redeemed slaves were sent to Kashmir, but the great majority settled down in the country and became Chinese subjects.

In regard to the Mir of Hunza, whom we drove out of his ancient castle on the Hunza river, he retired to

Chinese Turkestan, where he now lives as a State prisoner of the Chinese Government. There was in past times some connection between Kanjut and China, which in modern days expresses itself by an annual exchange of presents that still continues. When the Kanjuti deputation comes to Kashgar with the annual present, which consists of about one and a half ounces of gold dust, the members are accommodated in the Agency, and treated with the friendliness due to British subjects. The Chinese, with the large-mindedness that is their policy in dealing with subject or inferior races, treat the envoys handsomely, and send them back with considerably more than they bring. The son of the ex-Mir of Hunza lives at Yarkand on a *jaghir* given to his family in olden times, but the father is now old and broken, and is not likely long to survive his enforced detention at Kuchar in the north of the province.

CHAPTER XXV.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL RESEARCH.

At the present moment, when Chinese Turkestan swarms with archæologists, some recapitulation of the events which have recently stimulated antiquarian research in this country may prove interesting. French, Russian, German, and British expeditions are now at work, and though the probable results of their labours are not likely to revolutionise existing ideas with regard to the regions under investigation, there is every reason to expect that much light will be thrown upon pages of history hitherto undecipherable by Oriental scholars. Chinese annals of the later dynasties had long recorded the existence of buried cities in Eastern Turkestan, but it was not until the visit of the Forsyth Mission in 1873 that any confirmatory evidence from independent sources was forthcoming. But the stories of ancient ruins in the Lob Nor region, recounted to members of the mission by wandering natives of the country, were such a mixture of the reasonable and the preposterous that they attracted little attention, and certainly led to no antiquarian research.

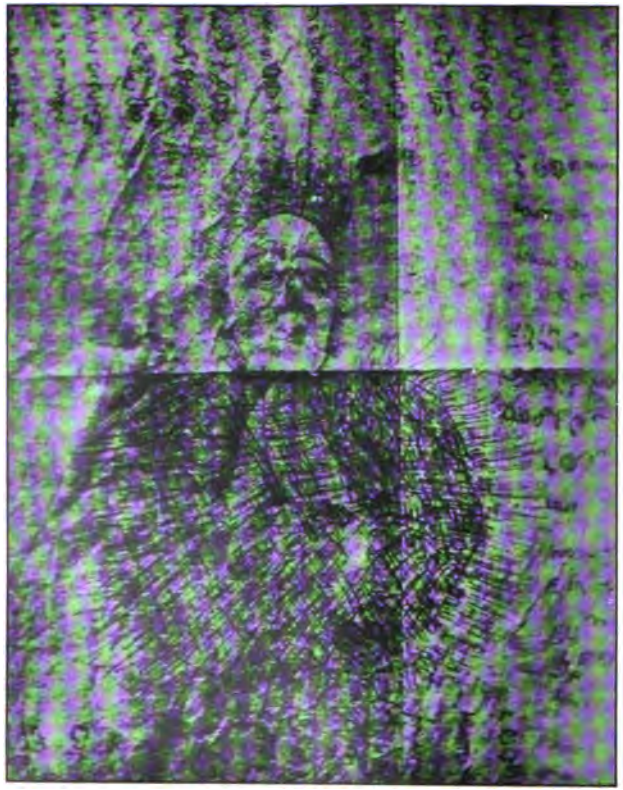
The discovery of the Bower MSS. in 1889 caused Orientalists all over the world to turn expectant eyes upon Central Asia. There quickly followed the Weber MSS., and then the Macartney MSS., all three emanating from Kuchar, and, as it ultimately turned out, all

belonging to the same find. The native treasure-seekers who had rooted these bundles of birch-bark leaves out of ancient ruins, only sold a part of their discovery to Captain Bower, hoping to find a market for the remainder elsewhere. After various adventures the unsold portions found their way into the possession of the gentlemen named, and were by them passed on to the hands of experts in India and Russia. While Bower was travelling in Central Asia, a Russian exploring expedition to the sources of the Orkhon river found remains of old Turkish civilisation, and other Russian travellers in the neighbourhood traced further indications of ancient habitation. In 1892 Dutreuil de Rhins, afterwards murdered in Thibet, obtained birch-back writings and manuscripts in the neighbourhood of Khotan, and actually visited the buried remains at Yotkan, afterwards identified as Yu'tien, or Khotan, as described by Chinese pilgrims of the fourth and seventh centuries. Students now noted that on both the southern and northern routes from Central Asia to China there had been discovered indications of ancient civilisation. The Annals continually refer to the entrance into China, from the west, of the Buddhist religion, and here was evidence of that Buddhist civilisation that must have served as a medium of transmission.

There now ensued an active demand for antiquities, the British and Russian agents at Kashgar, missionaries, and travellers all being anxious to procure specimens of the ancient documents, coins, pottery, &c., that were obtainable once the natives realised that such things were valued by Europeans. It had long been the custom of the country for improvident people to organise expeditions into the desert to search for treasure among the buried cities that the moving sand of the Taklamakan occasionally uncovered. There were many professional treasure-seekers, and they were easily

diverted to the search for articles of archæological interest.

The demand for ancient MSS. and suchlike became so great that the supply proved entirely inadequate, a state of affairs which gave rise to an extremely amusing result, though one the humour of which is not easily perceived by certain distinguished Orientalists who were victimised. A forger arose, and this talented individual palmed off on buyers large quantities of spurious documents that eventually reached Europe, and greatly puzzled wise men. Islam Akhun was the rascal's name, and the ancient documents turned out of his factory, the curious writing upon them, and the wonderful pictures, are not to be equalled among all the antiquities of the British Museum. One celebrated scholar who pondered deeply over the forgeries has touchingly observed that "These manuscripts are written in characters which are quite unknown to me, or with which I am too imperfectly acquainted to attempt a ready reading in the scanty leisure that my regular official duties allow me. . . . My hope is that among those of my fellow-labourers who have made the languages of Central Asia their speciality, there may be some," &c., &c. But there never were any to help the poor gentleman, until Islam Akhun was detected and put in jail by the Chinese. And while the forger was doing time in Central Asia, librarians in Europe were binding in calf and vellum the products of his factory. It has long been known that intellectual development is attained somewhat at the expense of inferior faculties, but the guilelessness which can accept as the work of the ancients the spirited specimens of freehand drawing reproduced in the accompanying photographs is surely ready for transubstantiation. Nevertheless, the document as here depicted was reproduced, along with many other forgeries, at great expense by a learned society in



" . . . the guilelessness which can accept as the work of the ancients the spirited specimens of freehand drawing reproduced in the accompanying photographs is surely ready for transubstantiation "—see page 278.

Calcutta, and to the extreme perplexity of bespectacled Orientalists in the Western world.

Besides the forgeries, however, there flowed to Europe a steady stream of genuine manuscripts, coins, seals, &c., that convinced scholars that Central Asia was a new and wide field awaiting archæological research. In 1897 the Russian Academy sent Dr Klementz to Chinese Turkestan, and he returned with interesting information of many ruins in the Uighur country around Turfan. The Geographical Society of Helsingfors, owing to the affinity between Finnish and other Tartar languages, had been greatly interested in these discoveries, and now deputed a leading member of the society, M. Otto Donner, to visit Turfan. His return in 1898 with antiquities, and photographs of remains indicating old Indian culture, put a climax upon the attention of learned Europe towards Central Asia. Simultaneously Dr Sven Hedin reported extensive areas of sand-buried ruins in the neighbourhood of Khotan and in the Lob Nor region.

Under the auspices of the Russian Government there was now formed an International Association whose object was the furtherance of exploration in Central Asia and the Far East. Committees were appointed in France, Russia, and Germany to collect funds and to arrange for the despatch of expeditions. Though England did not participate in the movement, the Indian Government, in consequence of the representations of Dr Hoernle, the eminent Indologist, decided to send Dr Stein to make a preliminary investigation of the situation. That gentleman in 1900-1 made a tour of the Khotan district, where he excavated ruins and obtained manuscripts and other relics of a civilised past in great quantity. Dr Stein's journey was regarded in Europe as of great archæological value, and he was publicly thanked for his services to science by the International Congress of Orientalists at Hamburg in 1902.

Of the countries forming the International Association, Germany was first in the field. The Berlin committee, having obtained funds, despatched Professor Grünwedel, Dr George Huth, and Herr Bartus to Turfan in 1902. Professor Grünwedel returned to Germany in the following year, and Dr Von Lecoq was sent out to take his place. Results had been so remarkable that there was no difficulty about the collection of further funds, and Professor Grünwedel returned to Central Asia in 1905, accompanied by Messrs Bartus and Port. After work at Kuchar, the expedition proceeded to Turfan. In 1905 a large collection of antiquities were sent to Europe, and though no detailed account of them has been given to the world as yet, it is known that the discoveries are of extreme interest. The work of the expedition is now practically complete, and Dr Von Lecoq, when I met him near Yarkand, was *en route* for India over the Karakoram mountains with thirty boxes of manuscripts and other valuables, which it was not thought advisable to risk on the Russian railways under then conditions.

While the first German expedition was at work, two Japanese, Count Otani and Mr Watanabe, were returning from Europe to Japan through Central Asia, and they made some very interesting excavations at Kuchar, which unfortunately were cut short by the death of the Count's father, and his immediate return home. Before the despatch of the second German expedition Russia was about to send a party to Central Asia, but owing to the war there was delay, and it was only in December of 1905 that M. Berezonski arrived at Kuchar. The expedition had not done much digging up to the time of my visit to Central Asia, but was busy preparing an archæological map of the district of Kuchar. Dr Stein now reappeared on the scene. Financed by the Indian Government and the British Museum, he arrived

at Kashgar in July of 1906, and was prepared to stay in the country for two years. He is accompanied by a native surveyor and a photographer, and was proceeding to survey the mountains south of Khotan when I had the misfortune to miss meeting him. On arrival of the cold weather he returned to Khotan, which he has since used as a base of operations for research in the neighbouring desert and in the direction of Lob Nor.

The French committee are last in the field, but a remarkably well-equipped expedition had recently arrived in Central Asia under the command of Professor Pelliot, the talented young Sinologue. He is accompanied by Dr Vaillant of the French Colonial Army as naturalist, and by a professional photographer. The expedition is to last for two years, and will proceed to Pekin *vid* Kuchar, Lob Nor, and Western China, studying in particular remains of the old culture along the route by which Buddhism reached China.

For the purpose of archæological exploration Chinese Turkestan resolves itself into four well-defined regions, in each of which remains of different periods are found. Of these, probably the neighbourhood of Khotan is the most interesting, for it embraces a longer period and has revealed a variety of influences not indicated elsewhere. Here are found writing in Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Thibetan, Chinese, and Hebrew. The first always appears on birch-bark, leather, and wood, and the language employed is an early Indian Prakrit with a large admixture of Sanskrit terms. Brahmi is interesting because it is evidently used not only for Sanskrit texts, but also to express the common language of the time. What that was scholars have been unable to determine as yet, but the presence of Persian words suggests an old Indo-Iranian tongue. Thibetan manuscripts are noteworthy, as they are the oldest yet discovered in that language. Chinese documents of various dates have been found,

but none later than the eighth century, thereby indicating, it is thought, the retreat of the Chinese before Thibetan invasion. Very few scraps of Hebrew writing have been unearthed, and they are evidently the work of Persian Jews then resident in the country.

At Kuchar there have been found Sanskrit documents in Brahmi writing, similar to those given to the world by Bower and to those found at Khotan. Both Khotan and Kuchar are likely to furnish much evidence of that ancient civilisation through which Buddhism filtered from India to China in the early centuries of our era. Lob Nor finds are all in Chinese, and the indications are that the ruins there were deserted about the fifth century A.D. Turfan explorations reveal the ancient civilisation of the Uighurs, and seem to deal with a period dating from the seventh century until the beginning of the Mongolian invasions in the thirteenth century. The later date of the civilisation that existed in Turfan is emphasised by the discovery of block-prints with texts of the old Sanskrit Buddhist canon, which could not well belong to a period prior to the general use of printing in China. Turfan documents are old Turkish, and are the first and only of their kind yet known that relate to Turkish Buddhism. There are, besides, the block-prints mentioned, and many papers of Manichean origin, the latter of particular value in view of the almost total disappearance from historical records of the literature of the Manichean doctrine. Recent discoveries at Turfan also include a large number of documents in a Syriac character, which, though not yet deciphered, undoubtedly relate to Nestorianism, a form of Christianity which is known to have penetrated as far as Western China many centuries ago.

The task before archæologists in Chinese Turkestan may be briefly summed up. We have to-day a country entirely Moslem, showing not a trace of the Buddhism

that once was practically the only religion. Contemporary history is dumb as to the date of the change and of the occurrences that led up to what can have been no less than a revolution. Then the rise as well as the fall of that Buddhism has to be traced. The period must have been one of great interest, for Buddhism was a civilising agency of great power, and probably changed a comparatively savage country into a polite one. There are abundant signs of both Greek and Chinese culture traceable to these times, and there is the outstanding fact that China received its Buddhism directly through Turkestan. It is the business of the expeditions now in the field to reconstruct for us the life and social organisation of the communities whose long-lost dwellings are being unearthed. Perhaps they may be able to go farther back and give us glimpses of pre-Buddhistic times, but so far nothing has been found belonging to a period earlier than the first century A.D., and it is feared that the moving sand of the desert has irretrievably covered up evidence of the presence of mankind prior to our era.

RUSSIAN TURKESTAN.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RUSSIAN SOIL.

AFTER seven weeks of Kashgar I was quite ready for marching, indeed anxious to begin again, for there is always danger that adipose accumulated during a long period of quiescence may become permanent. Such a risk I did not run voluntarily nor wittingly. Before leaving India I had launched into the post a sheaf of correspondence which was intended to fructify by the time I reached Chinese Turkestan. But when arrived at Kashgar I was disappointed to find that my efforts through London had not borne the expected result — permission from the Russian Government to travel in Russian Turkestan. There was nothing for it but another try, and this time I went straight to the font of all good things that emanate from Russia for the British traveller. A telegram to our Ambassador at St Petersburg, despatched through the courtesy of the Russian Consul, met with a prompt reply through China, and informed me that the subject of my hopes and fears was under consideration by the Russian Foreign Office. A fortnight later came a second cable from Sir

Arthur Nicolson intimating that my prayer had been granted. It is quite easy to criticise British representatives abroad and to say that they are backward in assisting their countrymen when applied to for aid. My own experience is that they are always helpful and obliging to travellers.

At the Russian Consulate my news was received with coldness. Orders with regard to foreigners travelling in Turkestan were very clear, and unless the Consul had instructions from the Foreign Office it was impossible to allow me to cross the frontier. I pointed out that the word of a British Ambassador was beyond doubt, and that the Consul's instructions must be *en route*, delayed perhaps by—here I hinted as delicately as possible at the disorder in Russia and the dilatoriness of the bureaucratic system. But no. A Russian defends a logical position as well as he does a trench, and no argument would persuade the Consul to depart from the letter of the law. And so, though part of my application had been that the Consul should be advised by telegraph of the decision of the Foreign Office, I had to wait a full month before the advice reached him. But when it did come he was obligingness personified, and we parted the best of friends.

It is no mean matter in these days to obtain entry into Russian Turkestan, particularly for people of British persuasion. An ordinary Russian passport is useless, and it is necessary to negotiate with the Russian Foreign Office through one's Ambassador, who of course is not to be approached lightly, before the matter can be considered at all. Who you are, and why you want to travel in the country that is popularly supposed to be the mobilisation ground for the future conquest of India, are pertinent questions that must be answered to Muscovite satisfaction. I happen to know of five countrymen who have applied for permission to travel on the

Transcaspian railway within the last eighteen months —and been refused. But an insignificant itinerant scrivener who has nowhere of his own to lay his head is not without compensation for his lack of home and family. He perhaps makes friends in high places—is not the pen mightier than the sword?—perhaps Providence has pity on his lonely state, and is complaisant where to others inexorable. There are indeed various reasons why the coveted permission should have been granted to me. But the English shikari from India, whom I met at Kashgar, probably stated the case most nearly when he said I was "damned lucky."

A caravan is one of the leading facts in travel, and as such is deserving of a place in the chronicles of a traveller. Between Kashgar and Osh there is considerable trade, and I had to decide whether to hire my caravan or buy the component parts and make my own. Horses at Kashgar being cheaper than at Osh, the coping instinct that is characteristic of the British-born suggested the opportunity for a deal. But the Scottish instinct deprecated the corollaries of purchase-money, feed, groom's wages, and so forth. Fifteen roubles per horse was the hire to Osh, and once that sum was paid out it was completely gone. Whereas, said the coper, you may buy for 40 roubles at Kashgar, make the journey, and sell at Osh for 50. Needless to say the Scot perceived the logic, though he doubted the premises. Anyhow, I bought four horses for about 150 roubles, and hired one Ismail to look after them. Saduk and I were to ride, and the baggage went on the other two, Ismail diligently leading in my presence, and doubtless riding when he got the chance. Having discarded two tents and a lot of false literature, and needing but a small amount of stores, the two nags easily carried my belongings.

We set forth on a fine October evening, and halted for the night at the edge of the Kashgar oasis. The Chinese

had again provided me with a courier, an elderly Beg with a long grey beard and riding a cream-coloured, pink-nosed steed afflicted with string-halt in the near hind. This individual had gone before and engaged quarters in a serai, where I was provided with a mud room, and the horses with food at prices that vexed my Caledonian soul. Saduk and Ismail quarrelled because the latter had lost the cooking-board and two chickens that Saduk had been fattening for a week. I had to interpose to save Ismail's life, for Saduk is inexorable to error in all but himself. Peace being restored I dined on a minor scale, the missing board and chickens being fatal to a complete meal.

But if I went short the nags did not. There are many sounds that break the silence of night to the charming of the human ear. The low thunder of distant surf, the swishing and rustling of a river, the tinkle of sheep-bells, the clocks of a city tolling the hour, the mariner's "All's well" that during the darkness floats down from a ship's rigging, are all melody for those to whom sleep cometh slowly. But for sheer music give me the munching of horses. My four woolly, hairy-heeled creatures were tied to the little verandah outside my door, and their straw was littered all over it. They blew like porpoises every now and then, but the munch, munch, never ceased, but kept on in an endless comforting monotone that might have brought peace to the mind of a murderer. Be his heels ever so hairy, there is always a glow of satisfaction to be obtained from the feeding of a horse. He is so foolish and wayward, yet so obedient to the hand which combines gentleness with firmness, that he has won for himself a warm corner in the heart of man. And when he munches with a satisfaction and a diligence that positively pervades his neighbourhood, the owner thereof enjoys a sense of duty done, of pleasure given, of justice, of mercy, in this treatment of his beast, that could hardly be obtained from the performance of many

deeds of virtue and righteousness. If opulent owners of racehorses and hunters would sometimes sleep a night near their animals they would learn a new joy. The winning of a Derby, or the ecstasy of a fast forty minutes, have high places in the scale of human pleasures; but for those who have ears to hear there is infinite charm in the rummaging, snorting, and chewing noises that mark supper-time in the stable.

It is hard to return to hills when already within the year you have crossed twenty passes averaging 16,000 feet high, and lived at a height of 15,000 feet for months on end. But that is the only way to get out of Eastern Turkestan, unless one makes a six months' journey through the desert to China. Just clear of Kashgar there were mountains, and they stretched westward in endless vista until a high range of white-capped peaks shut out the view beyond. We began the climb in a gravelly river-bed that gradually contracted in width from two miles to 100 yards, the while winding in and out between the hills. For six long days we wandered in a chaos of disintegrated mountains, unredeemed by a blade of grass, if the bottoms of a few valleys be excepted. Even the lofty Karakoram region boasted occasional tufts of coarse scrub, but here there were thousands of square miles in view in which there was not a sign of animal or vegetable life. The hillsides were all scored with deep hollows or ruts which ran uniformly, and made a wonderful pattern from which there was no general departure discoverable for twenty or thirty miles on either hand. Occasionally there was a deep and dark nullah into which we plunged, and then the cliffs that rose above were seen to be conglomerate or another formation of very old and decayed rocks. Water and ice must have done much of the rending and wearing away which was visible in every direction. Here, indeed, was a region that once knew a totally different climate.

"*. . . autumn in such places touches with a light hand . . .*"—see page 289.

Khirghis Nomads on the move.

And yet amid all this desolation there were bright spots. Having crossed a beastly little pass of 8000 or 9000 feet there would suddenly come into view a valley in which grew a wood of yellow, gold, and brown coloured trees. Autumn in such places touches with a light hand. The deep reds, terra-cottas, and chocolates of forests that are nourished in richer soil are absent, these thin-blooded trees taking only the paler but still exquisitely beautiful tints. Amid the universal drab of rock and hill these delicate patches of almost transparent colour shone faintly under the bright sun and suggested a mirage rather than a reality. Where the trees were, grass and corn grew in limited quantity, and here the Kirghiz pitched their tents. The *yourt* or *akoi* is an exclusively Central Asian institution, and a very comfortable and roomy house it makes. These good Kirghiz were always ready to make room for me, and I spent many nights in their company, sometimes with only a single old woman, but more often a whole family sleeping beside my camp-bed. The arrival of a foreigner was somewhat of an event, and I always had to run the gauntlet of many curious eyes. Lumps of sugar to the children when I was having tea speedily showed them that I was human, and not a being to be feared. At the second round I was trusted to put the sugar direct into little red mouths; and when once there joined in two young women whose husbands were away camel-driving, the amusement became quite thrilling. But generally the husbands of those worth playing this game with are handy, and then it would need a focal plane shutter working at the two-thousandth part of a second to record the glimpses one gets of their wives. It is a sign of top-hole manners among the young and attractive Kirghiz ladies to peep, and then to dart away like lightning. This etiquette may have its analogy in more sophisticated lands, but as a man of camps rather

than drawing-rooms I am not qualified to venture an opinion.

At the second halt out from Kashgar the local Chinese official came to call, bringing a present of ducks, pork, rice, and eggs. As he was too important for buksheesh, and I had nothing to give in return but his photograph —which I took and promised to send—I decided thereafter to avoid kindness I could not repay, and so skipped Ulugchat, the last Chinese post on the western frontier. The Amban sent a man after me to say he was prepared to receive me with honour and hospitality, but I professed great haste, and sent back a card and compliments. That was likely to be my last communication with the Chinese for many a long day, and at leaving Chinese territory I must record my opinion that from no people in the world could one receive in travelling more attention or courtesy.

On the eastern side of the nullah running into a wide river-bed, some two days' march beyond Ulugchat, there is a little board held upright by a heap of stones. On it is recorded that the Empire of China ends here. Down in the ravine is a fence, and beyond it a Russian Custom-house. With one step I find myself once again under European jurisdiction. The Customs officer comes out and takes my passport, and intimates that my baggage may pass unexamined. He is most kind and courteous in manner, and when I expressed the desire to stay the night at Irkeshtam he pointed upwards to the military post, where a round tower held a sentry on guard. Presuming there was some kind of public accommodation, Saduk and I led our horses up the steep incline and entered the gate of a big white enclosure. Cossacks in undress gazed at us as if we had just dropped from the clouds. Saduk tried Turki on them with very little success, and while we were in difficulty two officers appeared.

A Russian, if he knows French, always meets a foreigner with a salutation in that language. When the newcomers addressed me in Russian, I incautiously assumed that they knew no French, and boldly opened the conversation in the language of our Gallic neighbours, hoping thereby to establish a reputation for polish and education. But they soon found me out, for my microscopic acquaintance with French is confined to dim recollections of what I successfully evaded acquiring a generation ago. One, an engineer officer, asked if I had come to stay, and on my replying that I hoped to find a night's lodging, I was hospitably invited into the quarters of the Cossack officer, who was permanently stationed at Irkeshtam, the other being only on temporary duty. Tea was produced and I drank many glasses, and smoked hecatombs of cigarettes, the while we laboured at conversation on subjects ranging from the fecundity of fleas to the destinies of Europe in Asia.

We made a tour of the little post, and then called on the Telegraph and Customs officers. The latter was a married man, and his madame a charming little lady who found my French very amusing. She had been three years in Irkeshtam, and the only lady there, which equals some of our most outlandish stations in India. They kept dogs, cats, horses, sheep, goats, fowls, ducks, turkeys, and a young ibex that needed an addition to their fence to keep it within bounds. Returning to supper with my hosts, I found they were great believers in the future of their country. Railway development, they considered, would go on without interruption, and they spoke of the Tomsk-Tashkent line as likely to be an accomplished fact in the immediate future. I pointed out that 1800 miles of railway costs a great deal of money, but they declared that Russia was very rich and could find unlimited funds. I mentioned the rate at which Russian loans were quoted in foreign markets,

and hazarded that not only were these ruinous rates, but that Russian credit was already exhausted in Europe. But they laughed and said that the Russian people had unlimited money, and would be ready to lend it to the country whenever a satisfactory form of constitutional government was established. Evidently they were not sweet on the bureaucracy, declaring that it was responsible for all the recent troubles, including the reverse in Manchuria. Unbounded optimism regarding the future of Russia seemed the keynote of their ideas, and they were willing to stake all their confidence in the Tsar, providing he was advised by a representative Legislature.

They were very interested to hear some account of the war in the Far East, particularly what the Japanese opinion was of the Russian soldier. As the Japanese have always willingly conceded the bravery of their late enemies, I was able to gratify my hosts in that respect, and when I told them that their senior officers were regarded as the weakness in their army, they agreed that that was the universal view, even in Russia. They were astonished to hear that Europe regarded the railway transport during the war as a triumph for Russian organisation, and said that it was not so considered in Russian military circles. They view the war as a blessing in disguise, likely to lead to reformation and improvement in all departments of the State. The expense they thought a flea-bite, and the set-back to their expansion in the Far East they considered providential, for it would lead to concentration of the efforts to develop the resources of the enormous territory already flying the Russian flag.

Russians of the better classes are supposed to be less educated than corresponding ranks of society in the rest of Europe, but this was not apparent in the conversation of my engineer friend, who did all the talking, for the Cossack listened chiefly. It may be true in general, though all the Russians I have met have given me the

impression of possessing a wide knowledge of things and men. What is characteristic of them is a width of view which takes into consideration abstract factors very often ignored by more prosaic and probably more solid people. We are great in practical matters, guarding the pennies and leaving the pounds to take care of themselves. The Russian seems to work on the directly opposite principle, conceiving tremendous projects without sufficient means to carry them out. Thus in the Far East Russia took a much bigger bite than she could swallow, or even hold. Nevertheless there is something magnificent in the manner in which she has spread herself over Europe and Asia, and despite present turmoil in social conditions and certain faults of character it is impossible to believe but that the Russians are a great people with a mighty future.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TEREK PASS TO OSH.

AFTER the transit of the Himalaya, Karakoram, and Kuen Len mountains, the passing of the Alai range seems child's play, averaging as it does a good 5000 feet lower in height than the others. Twelve thousand feet above sea-level is the elevation of the Terek Pass, and it would hardly seem worth mentioning to readers surfeited with the monsters of Thibet, Zanskar, and Ladakh. Yet the Terek nearly claimed me for its own.

Immediately after leaving Irkeshtam it began to snow. Fortunately there was no wind, but the sky was deeply overcast and matters looked distinctly ominous. It was a question whether the pass would not be blocked before we reached it. The day's march included an ascent for a distance of about ten miles, and at every step the snow deepened. The many Hadjis on the road to Mecca were all early starters, thus avoiding the necessity of giving their horses a morning feed. Those good men had tramped the track and left a rut that was quite distinguishable, though fast disappearing as we slowly ascended. It was a long and weary climb, and our horses, not accustomed to the height, panted furiously, and showed a consistent desire to halt. Besides, the track was very slippery, and much floundering and staggering the result. The last few miles we found to be darkened by clouds, and the view of the flanking mountains was completely

Top of the Terek Pass, crowded with pilgrims, and a gorge below—see page 295.

hidden. I had my Burberry to keep the snow off my clothes, but my pith topee was quickly crowned with a high drift, while the icicles hanging from my beard rattled loudly whenever I turned my head. The temperature must have been considerably below zero.

Pressing onward, however, we eventually reached what looked like a perpendicular wall, down which straggled a few Cossacks leading their horses. We began zigzagging up an abominable track littered with ice-covered stones and rocks, and in a few minutes perceived the top of the pass in the haze above. Immediately before us was a string of Hadjis, among them a woman with a child riding behind her. Just as the horse bearing the double burden was making a final scramble for the summit, it slipped and fell, tossing the woman and child violently to one side. Both were damaged, and cried piteously. The top of the pass and the western slope was a wonderful and tragic sight. A knife-like ridge only three or four feet broad was crowded with people and horses for fifty yards. A long steep slope was dotted with foundered horses and loads, and everywhere people were scrambling up or down and shouting advice or admonition.

To comparatively level ground below there was a descent of perhaps 500 feet at an angle of at least 45 degrees, and in many places 60 degrees. This was covered with about twelve inches of snow, under which we speedily discovered was a sheet of ice studded with protruding rocks. Heavily loaded horses got their feet through the soft, newly-fallen snow on to the ice below, and at once lost their footing, slipped down at a great pace, and were either stopped by the snow banked up by their slide, or lost their balance and rolled over and over. Men leading their horses down would fall with the horses on top of them, and a horrid scramble would ensue, until some inequality in the ground stopped the struggling mass of arms and legs. The frantic efforts of the horses and the

distress of those in charge of them were no pleasant sights to witness.

Fearful of the descent which must be made were thirty or forty Hadjis waiting at the top of the pass, among them several women and children. The men were all old, with grey and white beards, many I should think well over seventy. One old woman, said to be over ninety, was strapped to her horse, she being too frail to grip the saddle or even to hold the reins. These old men make their pilgrimage in parties, many never expecting to return, and thinking themselves fortunate if they can reach Mecca before death overtakes them. When there are obstacles to be overcome on the way, they are helpless but for the charity of the young and strong. The attendants of the few caravans of merchandise were fully occupied with their own troubles, and there was nobody to help these unfortunate people. They made brave attempts to get down, letting their horses loose, and trusting the animals would find a way by themselves. One old fellow of sixty had his father with him, a toothless and bowed old creature, quite unable to help himself. Lifting his father off his horse, the younger greybeard tied a cummerbund to the older man's waist, and seating him on the snow, let him slide down by degrees. But it was a case of the blind leading the blind, and both old fellows made some agonising rolls before they reached safe ground.

Having watched this scene for half an hour, Saduk and I began the descent, leading our horses. Instead of going straight down we tried a cross-cut, and quickly found ourselves in difficulty. Saduk and his horse did a horrid slide, which ended in a rocky hummock, and no apparent damage. My nag followed me closely, and kept slipping on top of me until I had almost decided to let him go, when we both fell on a treacherous patch of snow, underneath which was a slide that a village school

would have been proud to patronise. During the ensuing scramble I had the horse's head in my chest at one time, and at another I lay across his belly, with his legs waving all around me. He managed to kick me three times as we both rolled over and over, and once he nearly crushed the life out of me, and would have done it but for the soft snow. By the time we separated, we were practically at the foot of the slope, and as I picked myself up and tried to get the snow out of my neck, I remembered the Irish labourer who, having fallen from the top of a four-storeyed house, consoled himself on rising to his feet with the remark that he had been coming down for bricks anyway.

The worst of the crossing over, we continued down a narrow valley that soon became a deep gorge among the mountains. The scenery was exquisite. Towering into a thick white mist that shrouded their tops were many snow-covered peaks. Their lower slopes were tree-clad, and only speckled with snow, as the steep rocky sides would not hold more than a tiny patch here and there. Trees loaded with snow possess a beauty too well-known to need description, but when they are so found in a deep chasm and projecting in curious and gnarled shapes from the walls of high precipices, they assume a delicate and filmy character worthy of a painter's ecstasy. For many miles we wound in and out of this fairy scene, into which large snowflakes floated slowly and lazily from the clouds that drifted amid the encircling mountain-tops. On the track we encountered strings of camels and horses pressing forward to the pass, that a crossing might be effected while still possible. The shouts of the drivers rang loudly in the rockbound gorge, the plaintive and protestant whistling of the camels floated weirdly in the air; and then a whirl of snow would blot out everything, and leave one wondering if this were reality, and not a transformation scene in some gigantic theatre.

After a drop of about 5000 feet over a track as rough and uneven as any encountered during my recent travels, we came to a region where very little snow had fallen, and where instead there was a tendency to rain. We found a little Kirghiz encampment in a narrow valley, and there took refuge. A blazing fire in a yourt and the ensuing cup of hot tea made amends for the travail of the day. Ismail turned up in good time, and reported fearful adventures on the pass, but no damage, unless his nose was frost-bitten, of which he was not certain. But an old Kirghiz woman gave it a tweak that quickly reassured him, and earned for her Ismail's hope that she might burn in everlasting fire—so translated Saduk with unconcealed joy. We all three spent the night in the same yourt, along with a large family of Kirghiz and two newly born goats who pled from sundown to sunrise for restoration to their bleating mothers in the cold outside.

In the morning there was sleet and a cold wind. We travelled all day in the midst of brown hills, patches of trees on which wore the autumn colours at their finest. A roaring torrent that we crossed and recrossed might have been a Highland river, and the weather certainly equalled bonny Scotland at her dirtiest. My Burberry soon became as naught, and I knew the dolefulness of wet knees on a wintry day. Round the world have I carried an umbrella from Briggs' in St James's Street, and never until this day had it been opened since leaving London. Saduk took it with him in the morning, and during the day rode with it open, breaking a bit off the handle at every verst, until there was nothing left to grasp but the wires inside. Then we arrived at Kizil Kurzan, the first village we had encountered since entering Russian territory.

Mention of the word village usually raises in the mind the mental picture of blazing kitchen fires, tidy parlours, window flower-boxes, and other evidences of simple com-

fort and decency. But the village we now reached was situated in a quagmire, and the houses were mud hovels of a description calculated to make a Connemara pig shudder. Under the impression that we could at least dry ourselves and be dry at night, I was thankful to halt at the abode of a Sart butcher who professsd to offer palatial quarters suitable to a Sahib. The chimney was dry enough to keep a fire alight, but the roof was nowhere sufficiently tight to keep out the rain. I moved hither and thither in the endeavour to avoid the dripping that persistently sought that spot on a man's head that ought to be sacred. If I become bald before my time, it will be because of the drip from the butcher's ceiling. At night mine host fixed a numdah above my bed, and swore I would be as cosy as if in a limekiln. Nevertheless I would have been completely dissolved in the night were it not that a long-neglected waterproof sheet was brought into play. Nor must I omit mention of my faithful friend the *naram garum bottli*, which has been over this, the last range of mountains I hope to see for many a long day, a consistent and effectual comforter.

Dawn of the next day brought sunshine and a change of weather. We set forth in the company of a batch of Hadjis, with whom I had some interesting conversation. They thought I was also a Hadji, and supposed I was Chinese, a nationality of which they had heard but never seen. They were astonished to hear I was English, a people they had supposed were dark, like all the inhabitants of India. They were bound for Mecca, but how they were to go or where they were to go they knew no more than did Sinbad when he mistook a whale's back for an island. They had money, and they just meant following in the footsteps of those who had gone before. One man had only a hundred roubles, plus the nag he bestrode, and which he hoped to sell at Osh. With great luck he may have landed on the shores of Arabia, but after that

he must have had to beg or work his way. How he would return to his native land on the slopes of the Thian Shan mountains he was content to leave to God, and Mahomet who was his Prophet. The Mussulman has only one kind of faith, the complete kind, deserving indeed to be termed sublime.

In a beautiful valley lies Gulcha, a Russian post with a small garrison. Here there was a proper bazaar, and I found a comfortable room in a serai. The valley is perhaps two miles broad and five or six long, and is the permanent camping-ground of many Kirghiz hamlets. The hills all around were covered with first-class pasture, while the valley itself was widely cultivated. Each of the rude huts, with which the Kirghiz in the last three years have replaced their yourts, has a stack of fodder on the roof, and their little steadings all bear evidence of considerable prosperity. In selling produce to the Russian post, and overcharging the unfortunate Hadjis and merchants with caravans who pass through their valley, they gather up riches for themselves in this world if not in the next.

From Gulcha the Russian road makes a circle round a mass of hills, but Saduk and Ismail were unanimous in their desire to try a short cut. We accordingly ascended once more into snow and crossed several passes, low in linear measurement but accursed in the eyes of a traveller. Indeed, I was weary to death of mountains, and would willingly have sacrificed six inches of my beard to travel level ground once more. At Langur I was gratified, for here we joined the main road, and thenceforth travelled in a narrow valley that gradually opened out and finally debouched upon the wide plain which stretches practically without interruption from Osh to the Caspian Sea, a distance of nearly 1000 miles.

At the head of the Langur valley we encountered the

A Valley on the Russian side of the Alai Mountains.

The Russian post in the valley of the Gulcha river.

first indication of what is one of the leading features of Russia's endeavour to assimilate her Central Asian possessions. Three little farm steadings were occupied by Russian peasants, and in the buildings, agricultural implements, and general surroundings there was an un-Oriental appearance that was more suggestive of European occupation than anything in the shape of fortifications or military garrisons which I afterwards saw throughout Turkestan. I visited one house with the idea of stopping for the night, and found it occupied by a man, his wife and sister, and a number of children. The latter were fair-haired and blue-eyed, and the picture of health. They were not over-clean or remarkably well-clad, but in their chubby cheeks and fat legs existed the strongest evidence of home comfort. This little farm was very neatly kept, and fowls, geese, and turkeys marched about with a confidence they could hardly have displayed if they had understood how ready they were for market. Corn had been grown on the surrounding fields, but with the autumn so well advanced it had been already garnered, and there was nothing on the land to show but stubble. Garden or vegetable growing was not visible, and the place looked somewhat bare. What was remarkable was that not a native of any kind existed on the premises, and I gathered that none were employed on the work of the farm. This is Russian occupation with a vengeance, and it is the fact that Russia is able to transplant her pure blood into her Central Asian possessions with every assurance that it will flourish, that gives her position in these regions a security and permanency which never could be achieved by military occupation alone.

The degree in which these people are independent of the natives for a living is emphasised by the fact that the women and children could not speak a word of Turki, though I afterwards heard that the man, who

was absent at the time of my visit, knew a few words. Their farm produce is taken to the neighbouring garrison town of Osh, where it realises a price sufficient to procure all the simple things that are necessary to the existence of the Russian peasant. An unrestricted family is growing up in that farmhouse, and in another fifteen years there will be sons to take up further land and daughters to marry time-expired soldiers or others who propose to settle where an ample living can be obtained by reasonable exertion. While there may be no comparison between the natural wealth of Russian Turkestan and India, it is evident that the Russians are able, by reason of the temperament of their people, and partly because the climate makes it possible, to consolidate their position in certain parts of their Asiatic possessions in a manner utterly beyond our power in India. These settlers, of course, have been State-aided, and it is undeniable that the demand for the produce of their farms is to a great extent the consequence of the military occupation of the country. But though the situation at present is more artificial than natural, it is impossible to ignore the probability that another generation will see an important modification in conditions. The families of the settlers who now cater to military necessities will be driven to exert themselves in other directions, and in a country where agricultural methods are archaic and manufacture unknown, there should be no difficulty about openings. Twenty years hence there will be in Western Turkestan a leaven of Russian population living, be it particularly noted, on equal terms with the natives, working as they work, eating what they eat, and as simply clothed. Such a leaven will be an invaluable guarantee for the future.

The Osh oasis is of imposing dimensions, and when approaching it from the foothills of the Alai mountains one is impressed with its extent, which the eye cannot

measure, and with its fertility, to which trees, hedges, and abundant vegetation amply testify. Here are fields of grass thick and velvety, and endless variety of trees and bushes now gleaming with the gold and yellow hues of autumn. Horses and cattle are grazing in many of the fields, flocks of geese and turkeys wander about meadows, and comfortable farmhouses nestle under trees. But for the mud used for walls and buildings one might easily imagine oneself in Europe.

In the middle of the huge plain which stretches westward towards the setting sun there is a tall pile of rocks that in the distance seems to tower above the town of Osh, as does Arthur's Seat over Edinburgh. There is the difference that here trees completely shroud the buildings, none of which is big enough to pierce the clouds as do the monuments and steeples of the Scottish capital. Before reaching the town there are six or seven miles of farming country to be traversed. Every mile or two there is a hamlet and a few shops, but the chief characteristic is an endless succession of detached farmhouses standing amid their own fields. I have used the word oasis in connection with Osh, but while much of the cultivation is the result of irrigation, it is not wholly so, for on this side of the Alai mountains the country is subjected to a moderate rainfall and to a nightly dew. Delightful and comforting as are the oases of Chinese Turkestan, there is yet an entire absence of the verdure that springs up without cultivation. The lanes, though shaded by spreading trees, are floored with nothing but sand or dust, and where human labour has not brought the life-giving water there must be desert. But in the neighbourhood of Osh the fields are often separated by thick hedges that grow wild, or are covered with flowers and berries, while they riot into small jungles where man has not restrained them.

The bazaar of Osh may be summed up in the word

Oriental. The shops are open to the street, and each owner sits on the floor waiting his customers. His goods differ in few respects from those to be seen in the bazaars of Northern India. The abundance of Russian oil makes the lamp, of coloured glass or highly polished metal, a favourite article of display. Loaves of sugar in the familiar blue-paper packing are conspicuous. Mirrors of various sizes indicate the presence of cheap German manufacture, as do various other small articles that appeal to the taste of womenkind. Scent from Russia, and coloured soap, are evidently favourites with the natives, and altogether it is evident that in this part of Asia the East wants just the same trashy things from the West as it does in other regions on the wrong side of Suez. One curious thing is that all the colour which makes a bazaar so attractive a scene to the European is worn by men and not by women. The female sex is seldom seen in the streets of a town in Western Turkestan, and when a woman does appear she is clad in dull grey and veiled in a manner to defy the keenest scrutiny. The garment that covers up what one likes to think are charms is a long cotton paletot with two broad tails depending from the head behind and dangling about the heels. In front this robe overlaps and covers up whatever of finery the owner may be wearing underneath. The veil is of thick black net, stiff like jean, which is attached to the head part of the paletot and falls in a broad apron in front of the face and bosom of the wearer. It is so big and wide, and fixed in such a manner, that it is difficult to displace, and so the passer-by has no chance of obtaining a glimpse of the lady behind; nor is the lady, even if she wished it, able to allow those fleeting glances at her countenance which are at once the joy of giver and receiver.

After much wandering in Osh we found quarters in the Serai Sultan, ourselves in two little rooms on the

first floor and the horses in the stables underneath. I preferred to live in a native house, for there Saduk was at home and could prepare whatever food I wanted. In the Russian posthouse, for there is no hotel at Osh, Saduk is like a collapsed balloon, and is able neither to cook nor to order food for me. As for myself, I can speak no word of Russian, and the simple caretakers know no language but their own, with results painful to a hungry man.

One of my earliest efforts at Osh was to call upon Colonel Alexeieff, who occupies a position similar to that of a Commissioner, and who is called Hakim by the natives. It being a Russian festival his office was closed, and I went to his private residence in some fear lest such a step should not prove acceptable. The Colonel, however, was most agreeable and showed no displeasure at my invasion of his privacy. But alas! the permission to photograph was not to be, and the best that the Governor-General at Tashkent could do for me was to advise application to the Foreign Office at St Petersburg through the British Ambassador. The delay entailed by such a course being known to me by experience, I almost wept, for the refusal meant the virtual relinquishment of all hope. The Colonel comforted me, and suggested that if I went to Tashkent it was possible that my personal petition might be more successful.

I now went to the telegraph office, and there found a charming young Russian lady who could speak French, and who agreed to send a telegram for me in that language to the Secretary of the Governor-General requesting that I might be allowed to visit Tashkent. I may here remark that the employment of women in the post and telegraph offices seemed universal in Russian Turkestan. A remarkable thing is that the young ladies thus earning their living are all good-looking, and very kind to strangers. The giving of appointments to the well-

favoured ones is testimony to the taste of the Russian bureaucracy, and I am only too glad to put in a word for an institution that has recently been given a bad name both in Russia and Europe. At the same time it is necessary to mention that this course leads to serious dissension in garrison towns, and that where those young ladies are kept it is necessary to put a guard upon them. My kind friend had behind her a soldier with fixed bayonet, and he looked so cross because of my long-drawn-out confabulation with her in a language he could not understand that I thought it expedient to retreat. In due time the permission arrived, but in the meantime I made more acquaintances in Osh.

Colonel Alexeieff sent a messenger to say that if I would come to his office he would produce somebody who could speak English—I may mention that with the Colonel my French did not flow so easily as it did at the telegraph office—and who would clear up some matters that our conversation left doubtful. The messenger was a Sart munshi who knew Persian, and who responded to certain words of Hindustani which I launched at him. I was interested to learn that he had accompanied Colonel Yonoff on that famous expedition to the Pamirs in 1892, and that he was acquainted with various British officers. We were just getting to grips about politics when we arrived at the Hakim's office, and I was ushered into Colonel Alexeieff's presence.

He had before him two moujiks who were evidently petitioning, what for I could not say. But I was interested to observe that while they treated the Colonel with great deference, they were not in the least afraid to express their own views. But these differed from those of Colonel Alexeieff, and he was putting his foot down with a mixture of the patriarchal and the authoritative which reminded me of the parental knee. When the moujiks retired they were succeeded by a padre in a white

robe and golden locks, and this gentleman shook hands with great cordiality when we were introduced. His name is too jaw-breaking for reproduction. At the padre's house, it appeared, there lived the individual who could speak English, and as he was sick it became necessary to adjourn to the apostolic abode.

On arrival I was presented to M. Juliette, a very old gentleman with a long white beard. He breathed hard for a few minutes, and then gave birth to a remark in an accent quite strange to me. His knowledge of my language seemed very slight, and I began to think my French was better than his English, when he astonished me by declaring that he was an American, and had served thirty years in the United States navy. Having settled our business, Colonel Alexeieff departed, and the padre asked me to stop to dinner. I sat next to M. Juliette, and soon discovered that his daughter had married the padre. I asked him how it was that a citizen of a free republic had sacrificed his birthright to become a Russian. This question went right home, and the old man made an exclamation, throwing up his arms with a mixture of solemnity and despair that argued unspeakable things. He made no reply, and I judged it better to abstain from pursuing the subject.

At dinner the padre produced a bottle of brandy for me, and I was horrified to find that I was expected to keep pace with my host and his vodka. I was given half a tumblerful at a time, and we all clinked glasses every two minutes. No heel-taps is the rule in Russia, and I feared to offend the amiable padre, who took his own liquor like a laird. Providentially my bottle was only a pint, and when that was finished it was found that there was no more brandy in the house. After dinner madame produced a French-Russian conversation book, and we had an interesting but laborious colloquy, during which I found no other way of expressing my regard for the

lady but by the bald statement *Je vous aime.* This sentiment was received with much approval both by madame and her husband, and I was gratified to think that the brandy had rendered me more gallant than is my modest wont. I had hoped to have further communication with M. Juliette, who was the grandson of a Frenchman who had settled in Mobile over a century ago, but he was in bad health at the time and had to retire before dinner was finished, and I did not see him again.

While stopping at the Serai Sultan I was visited by a native gentleman who had heard of the arrival of an illustrious stranger. As a dweller in the same serai, he came to pay his respects. His name was Moussa Khan, and his business that of a merchant. He was a Sart from Khokand, and his personal appearance was more glorious than I had previously supposed a man's could possibly be. He was tall and slender, with a pale face, dark moustache, and languishing eyes. In looks and dignity of bearing he could not have been surpassed by a shop-walker. On his head was a small pink turban, and over his clothes he wore a loose overcoat of silk, barred with chocolate-coloured lines in between which was an exquisite pattern of every hue under the sun. He wore long boots of claret-coloured morocco leather, and carried an ebony silver-topped Malacca cane. This bird of paradise, however, was genial and friendly to a degree, and invited me to tea in his quarters.

Saduk accompanied me as interpreter, and I was astonished to find how luxurious was the apartment into which we were shown. The floor was covered with rich Persian rugs, and the walls with beautiful silk carpets from Khotan. A neat mahogany writing-table with green baize top stood at one side, and in another part of the room was a Russian stove. There were pictures and photographs, little cabinets, and richly-bound books

placed here and there, all indicating that my host was a man of wealth, taste, and education. He was son to an individual who had been high in the service of the last Khan of Khokand, and who is now apparently in Russian employment, or at least in favour with the conquerors of the country. It appears that the Governor-General had given Moussa Khan a nomination to a Russian school at Tashkent, and that he had spent two years studying the Russian language, geography, and physics. It was interesting to hear that both Persian and Arabic are taught at this school, and that the Russians do not despise the literature of the countries bordering their Asiatic territories. He and another boy had been the only Mussulman scholars, all the rest being Russian-born.

Moussa Khan gave me some interesting information about the country and the customs of the people, which I found to differ little from those of the Mussulmans of Chinese Turkestan. I asked him if he thought his country would ever become independent again, a question that seemed to astonish him not a little, for he evidently regarded the Russians to be as inevitable in Turkestan as the sun is in the heavens. This attitude on the part of natives towards Russia is, so far as I have been able to discover, universal in the eastern portion of Russian Turkestan. My experience of the country has been of course very limited, but I must declare that all my observation leads me to the belief that the people are content under Russian rule. They are lightly taxed, and left alone to trade and cultivate in security. Previous rulers had ground them down with taxation and sudden calls for money to make war or gratify extravagant tastes. Under the Russians they pay fixed revenue and certain duties. Doubtless there is squeezing here and there, but not in a degree that violates the Asiatic idea of the fitness of things. It would, of course, be absurd to suppose that the people like the Russians, or that they would

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TASHKENT.

At Osh I spent several days warding off Jewish horse-dealers. They came round the stables like bees, fought to be allowed to look at the horses I had brought from Kashgar, and they one and all vied with each other in expressing their contempt for my cattle. Saduk and Ismail conducted negotiations, and periodically reported progress. The offers received froze my blood, and I concluded that when a horse-dealer was a Jew he was at his very worst. The only compensation I derived from the eternal bargaining that disturbed the peace of the Serai Sultan lay in Saduk's vituperation of the individuals who, having trotted the horses up and down, took themselves off without purchasing or making a decent bid. An ancestry that goes back to the Flood gives wide scope for the casting of aspersions, and Saduk was evidently well acquainted with sacred history. One Jew offered a hundred roubles for the four horses, and Saduk, in scorning the offer, warned him not to look round as he departed lest he suffered the fate of his hundred and first grandmother—Lot's wife! Others he reproached with their descent from a woman who had lent herself to a serpent, and he allowed none to forget that they bore the mark of Cain. He cast in their teeth every malefactor of Hebrew birth from Beelzebub to Judas Iscariot, and generally showed himself a Mussul-

man of education and orthodoxy. Jews have never been popular in Central Asia, and frequently they have suffered martyrdom. The unfortunate men who tried to make an honest penny at my expense dared not raise their voices in defence, but if looks could kill Saduk were a dead man several times over. The horses got sold in the end, but at a price I decline to mention, and indeed the subject is one which I do not care to pursue.

On my third day at Osh I was delighted to encounter a Swedish missionary who had just arrived from Kashgar, where he had gone as escort from Sweden to two young ladies destined for mission work. I asked Mr Anderson how it was he had been trusted with such a pleasant task, and he explained that when he had been in China he had had a great deal of practice, on one occasion convoying no fewer than nine English girls to the interior, a journey of three months. He said that the despatch of young missionary ladies to their destinations was always a difficulty, partly because men were not often available, and partly because the men that might go were not allowed to by their wives. He had got into the way of helping on such occasions, and now he got more of it than he cared for. Who would not be a missionary!

Mr Anderson and I chartered a phaeton to take us to Andijan. We loaded all our goods upon an arba, the high-wheeled cart of Central Asia, put Saduk on the top, and then set forth. This was my first experience of a Russian vehicle, and I am grieved to think it was not my last. The phaeton was supposed to seat two people, but though neither my companion nor myself are broad beyond the average, we found it impossible each to achieve a square posture. The accommodation was so small that one of us had always to sit sideways, a precarious position when the condition of the road is considered. Seven long years ago the Russian authorities

constructed between Andijan and Osh a road both broad and straight. They metalled it, caused it to be blessed by the clergy, and then rested on their laurels. The effect of the blessing has now worn off, as well as the metalling, and there remains only a ruttiness that upon those who drive over the road has the effect of a galvanic battery. The phaeton had marvellous springs, and at each bump the one of us who sat sideways was jerked over the knees of the other, like a naughty schoolboy. We took turns at this variety of agony, and after five and a half hours arrived at Andijan.

There we found a small hotel, and after many days I entered a civilised room. There was a bed with wire mattress, chairs, and a couch boasting upholstery that Tottenham Court Road could not equal, and blinds to the windows! It was a Russian holiday, and the dinner was out of the common. Mr Anderson and I satisfied ourselves on soup and bread, only to find that there was a meat course. And when we were gorged they brought us pudding. Nor did we then flinch. We were fifteen days out of Kashgar, and a polite meal off china and on a tablecloth found us behindhand with the comforts of life. Our Russian bedrooms—in which, by the bye, one feeds, as there are no dining-rooms in Central Asian hotels—lacked some of the conveniences, but the absence of bedding and suchlike was a small matter to travellers. The washing accommodation was a sort of sideboard with a little tap. The basin was about the size of a slop-basin, and the hole at the bottom had no plug. The plan is to turn the tap, catch a teaspoonful of water in the hollow of your hand—and then wash. If you want to tub in Russian Turkestan you must go to the Caspian Sea, for there are no baths in the country, owing to the high duty and the natural disinclination of the Russian to water in bulk.

Andijan boasts 50,000 inhabitants, and is the terminus

of a branch of the Central Asian railway system. Naturally it is the emporium for all Russian goods destined for the eastern parts of Russian territory, and for Chinese Turkestan. There are here agents for forwarding companies, churches, bakers' shops, and other symptoms of civilisation. In 1902 Andijan was visited by an earthquake that levelled to the ground every house of European construction, as well as the greater part of the native bazaar. I have been told, though I do not quite believe it, that no fewer than 20,000 people lost their lives. It is certainly a fact that great numbers of Russians were killed, and that the earthquake caused much destruction of property. It has led to the entire reconstruction of the Russian town which, with its broad streets and houses situated in their own compounds, strongly suggests the cantonments of an Indian station.

At Andijan, Anderson and I took tickets for Tashkent. My first experience of a Russian train was not altogether happy, for I was wearing breeches and putties, shooting-coat and solar topee, all remnants of my travelling kit, and very much the worse for wear. One little Russian boy asked me if I was a Kirghiz, and a very smart young soldier who boarded the train at Margilan said, after our acquaintance had advanced somewhat, that I presented the spectacle of a *touriste*. He was a Polish Jew conscript, in whose family had been a French governess, in consequence of which he spoke the language of Gaul with dignity and fluency. He explained that he was the son of a very big business at Varsovie, in Poland, and that it was his intention, when his servitude was over, to open a branch at Samarcand. I asked what the nature of the business was, and he said—*parfumerie*. I told him that I was going to Tashkent, and he said I must procure myself a costume, so that I should not look ridiculous when sight-seeing in that important city—it was at this moment that he observed that I looked the typical

English tourist. He enlarged in particular on the necessity for a proper hat, as my topee attracted great attention—it had begun life under the wheels of a ticca gharry in Calcutta, and had since served as a nosebag for horses, as a basket for grapes, as a pillow by night and an umbrella by day, besides fulfilling various other functions. I asked my young friend what was the best shop to go to in Tashkent. He said there was one very great tailor's emporium there—the Maison Druzkin. *Et M. Druzkin, il est mon oncle!*

At Cherniyevo the train stopped, and we were compelled to alight and wait the mail proceeding by the main line from Krasnovodsk to Tashkent. Saduk appeared from a third-class carriage wearing a hunted look. The train had frightened him greatly, besides which a thief had stolen his outer garment, and forced him to know that the land was a land of Shaitan. After an hour in the refreshment-room it was 1 A.M., and we looked for the early advent of the train. But other people began getting food, and I thought I might do likewise. At two o'clock my order at a venture appeared, and I was horrified to find that it was roast and very fat pork, with a tasteless sort of breadcrumb support. A long table was surrounded by passengers, all drinking tea out of glasses. Besides many Russians there were present Jews and Armenians, several Sarts, three officers, among them a Colonel, and a Pope. The latter had long flowing locks, which, to beguile the time, he combed in front of a pocket looking-glass. A more heterogeneous company it would be hard to imagine, but it was suggestive of the Russian attitude to natives, for the Colonel had no idea of resenting the presence of his neighbour, a fat merchant, who looked a bunnia all over. After five hours of waiting the train appeared, only four hours late, a very satisfactory performance in Russian eyes.

On arrival at Tashkent, Anderson and I found our-

selves in deep water. I knew no Russian, and he only six words. And as he vented those in a mild evangelical manner they had no effect. My Hindustani swears attracted much more attention. We wanted to collect our baggage, to find out when various trains went, to get breakfast, and so forth. But everybody was too busy to listen seriously to what they could not understand. In our loneliness we were delighted to be saluted in honest English, and Anderson said it was surely in answer to a silent prayer of his. Our friend turned out to be a German who, seeing my yakdans and camping-kit, concluded I was a traveller just returned from the wilds. Perceiving our difficulties he stepped in and ended all our troubles, for he spoke Russian and English as well as he did his own language. Entering the refreshment-room he took us up to a party and I was introduced to his wife—a good Scotch countrywoman—and my cup of thankfulness was full. It turned out that our new-found friends had just returned from an exploring trip in the Bokharan Pamirs, where they had traced the source of the Zarafshan river, and had done some interesting glacier work. With their Swiss guide they were now returning to Europe, and were only waiting at Tashkent for the Orenburg and Moscow train. As kindred spirits we foregathered with a vehemence that excited the suspicion of the police.

One of my earliest duties at Tashkent was to call upon the Governor-General's Secretary, with a view to obtaining permission to take photographs. But before so doing I paid a visit to the Maison Druzkin and bought a pair of trousers and a soft squash hat. My young friend of the train appeared after I had completed my purchases, and seemed greatly disappointed at my moderation. Nevertheless he said he would call upon me the next day and take me round the town, now I possessed civilised clothes. Then I waited upon Colonel Mustaphin, a very

charming and obliging gentleman. He thought the photography would be easily managed, and making an inquiry on the telephone, there shortly afterwards appeared a gorgeously clad officer whom I took to be no less than a full General. I was introduced to him, and he said he would obtain the Governor-General's permission if I would call at Government House in an hour. This I did, and to my horror was informed that I would be granted an interview with His Excellency. I pleaded the clothes of the Maison Druzkin, the shabbiness of my appearance, all to no effect. I was a voyageur, which explained everything.

The full General of my imagination turned out to be Aide-de-Camp Schamskeff, a simple captain in rank but a Skobeleff in dash and accomplishments. For personal appearance and dignity of manner he equalled anything I had ever seen in Viceregal circles, and my chief feeling was one of regret that he could not be matched with some of the dashing and gallant young personages who cast such a glamour around the representatives of Royalty in India. French and English came from his Russian lips like music from a fiddle, his height was Burnabyan, his waist Piccadillian, and his eye had the military fire of an Alexander. Yet to a poor simple scrivener he had the manners of a dove and the kindness of a Samaritan. The only reproach I have to level at him is that he remarked, while I was waiting the appearance of the Governor-General, that he hoped I realised the honour that was being conferred upon me. Could he not have seen that I was trembling in my shoes!

The great man was General Matsievski. When he appeared I tried hard to avoid sinking into the ground, and bowed with as much humility as my British back could assume. His Excellency looked as if he might be own brother to an erstwhile Viceroy of India, now Secretary for Colonial Affairs to his Britannic Majesty. Here was no bird of paradise, but a plain man, plainly dressed in

blue uniform. He asked where I had been and where I was going, and all the time he was gimletting me through and through. It is a terrible thing to be weighed in the balance of a great man. The only remedy is to counterweigh without blinking. His Excellency asked me if I could speak Russian, and I said, with as little thankfulness as I could assume, that I did not know a single word. The General then expressed astonishment—through Schamskeff as interpreter—that I should attempt to travel in Russian territory without knowing the Russian language; he himself always spoke English when he went to England. I explained that I had recently visited every country in Asia, and that it was impossible to know all their languages; that if my countrymen had acted upon that principle the British flag would not now be waving over so great a portion of the world—this with some natural pride. Even the worm will turn.

My reply was not received with particular favour, and General Matsievski turned to a sheaf of papers that he carried in his hand. Said he, "You are redacteur of 'The Times of India,'"—an accusation that took my breath away. I demurred, but it was no use, for the papers in His Excellency's hand contained definite information to that effect, besides my personal history from the age of five upwards. I was evidently regarded as dangerous, and perhaps the fact that I had shared the fortunes of those two arch-enemies of the Russian soldier, Kuroki and Nogi, during the late war did not count in my favour. I feebly protested that my object in travelling was to write a book, and that the few letters I sent to 'The Times of India' did not constitute editorship, nor indicate my agreement with the views or policy of the Bombay Thunderer.

His Excellency asked how could I expect to receive permission to take photographs in Samarcand when my permit from the Russian Government as regards

Turkestan was merely to travel from Andijan to Askabad—no privilege to stop on the road being mentioned? I explained that my permit had not been interpreted in that way by any of the Russian officials I had encountered so far, and that I wished to take photographs in Samarcand merely because it was a place of historic interest. General Matsievski said that if he was given permission to travel from London to Manchester, what would we think of him in England if he tried to alight midway? My mental remark was that we should think very little of his taste, but my spoken reply was to the effect that Samarcand was more interesting than any place we had in England. But I perjured myself in vain, for His Excellency plainly stated that if he allowed me to stop *en route* I would write a great deal about Russian doings in Central Asia, probably to the discredit of Russia, and that the Foreign Office in St Petersburg would then blame him for having given me the opportunity. I thought to myself that if the General knew as much as I did about redacteurs he would know quite well that seeing or not seeing had very little to do with their writing about a place.

The Governor-General would not be persuaded to take a different view, and shortly afterwards the interview ended, and I was left with the sad knowledge that I was expected to go straight to Askabad without stopping at Samarcand or Bokhara as I had intended. His Excellency was not going to run any risk, and as he had only been appointed Governor-General in the last fortnight perhaps he was wise to shirk responsibility. But it was a kind of wisdom one would have expected from a police officer, and not from the ruler of a huge principality. If Russia only makes war on India in this key we need have no anxiety. And when we catch General Matsievski, and he is lodged in a prisoner's camp on the banks of the Jumna, I shall be able to

heap coals of fire upon his head by helping him to photograph the Taj.

That afternoon, when tempting Providence by making chance shots at the menu at a restaurant, who should walk in but my little soldier friend. He proposed taking me to see the sights—after a critical glance at my attire. We set forth, and as I have done all the walking I ever want to in this world, I proposed a carriage. My friend was very particular about picking out a smart sort of victoria, and, being seated, we drove off at a dashing pace, I leaning back in enjoyment. Not so my companion. He sat up like a grenadier, and his eyes searched the road right and left, while his hand was perpetually at the salute to passing officers. He was on leave for a week from his regiment at Margilan, and the slightest inattention to the proprieties would mean trouble. I rather fancied, too, that he thought himself watched, and in these days of pogroms and counter-pogroms it seemed natural enough that one of the hated race, and from Poland, should be an object of suspicion. Whatever the attitude of the police towards him may have been, he suddenly conceived a horror of my company, stopped the carriage, and darted round a corner after a friend. He had asked to be excused for a moment, but when he did not appear in five minutes I realised that a remark I had made had frightened him. In all innocence I had soliloquised upon the strangeness of finding myself driving in the afternoon with a simple conscript, whereas in the morning I had been hobnobbing with a full General, who was Viceroy of Turkestan to boot. His astonishment at hearing that a mere tourist had been so honoured quickly merged into apprehension that there was something unnatural about the company he was keeping, and when I added that the Governor-General had declined to let me take photographs, and had ordered me straight

to the frontier, he became thunderstruck at the idea of his proximity to so dangerous a person. I never saw him again, and for all I know he may now be in Siberia. But I cannot think that there will be any worse future for him than selling scent in Samarcand, and touting for uncle Druzkin.

The sights of Tashkent are exceedingly meagre. With the exception of the Library, the Observatory, and one or two churches, all ordinary enough, the buildings of the town are very simple and have no attractions, architectural or artistic. Indeed, throughout Turkestan the Russians aim only at utility, and seldom aspire to more than single-storeyed erections. The native town is a replica of every other bazaar in Central Asia, and while it offers a wonderful variety of type to the physiognomist there is little difference between the dress and general appearance of the people encountered in the streets. Perfect order is maintained without any appearance of force, and the only police I saw were a few natives dressed in uniform. Soldiers appear to be entirely debarred from the town, possibly in consequence of a revolutionary row which took place at the railway station a few months before. It appears that several of the men of the sapper battalion stationed at Tashkent were being despatched to Siberia to serve sentences for ordinary crime, when their comrades gathered at the station to effect a rescue. A battalion of infantry was called out, and a regular battle took place near the station, when, I have been informed, as many as sixty were killed. Order was then restored, but upon what terms I cannot say. But it is understood in the town that there was no punishment meted out, and that the supersession of the previous Governor-General by General Matsievski was a consequence of the weak behaviour of the administration.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RUSSIA IN TURKESTAN.

THOSE who search diligently in ancient history may find mention of the region now known as Russian Turkestan at dates many hundreds of years before Christ. No great reliance can be placed on much of the information so gleaned, but it would appear to be beyond dispute that Alexander the Great took Samarcand in the year 329 B.C., and doubtless the other deeds which he did on the banks of the Jaxartes, now the Syr Daria of European maps, have some foundation in fact. Anyhow, the professional story-tellers of Central Asia are great to this day on the exploits of Iskander Padshah, and to shake faith in the hero of their street-corner romances would be both unkind and unnecessary. Scythians, Bactrians, and Parthians fought like tigers over Central Asia until the advent of the Huns, who in turn appear to have been replaced by the Chinese somewhere about the first century B.C. Four hundred years later an eruption of White Huns displaced the Chinese, and next there followed a succession of Persian conquerors.

The rise of Mahomedanism in Western Asia was followed in due course by Arab armies which swept east and north, reaching Samarcand in 676 A.D., and inflicting severe defeat on the defenders. So far the Oxus and Jaxartes country had been inhabited by people professing the faith of Zoroaster. But in 705

a holy war was declared, and after a series of Mussulman expeditions one Kutayba burned all the graven images at Samarcand, and eventually marched as far as Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan. About 737 Islam seems to have been generally established in Central Asia, and thereafter there is a long record of war between rival sects and different dynasties. At the end of the tenth century the Uighurs, a race from the Thian Shan mountains, sprang into prominence and conquered Samarcand and Bokhara. They were soon ejected, however, partly, it is interesting to note, by the famous Mahmud of Ghazni, who not long after invaded India and set alight in that country the torch of Islam. The Persian Seljuk dynasty now had an innings until displaced by the Kara Khitays, a Chinese people, at the beginning of the twelfth century, an event remarkable in the history of Western Turkestan, for it meant that followers of the Prophet were conquered and ruled by Buddhists.

Hitherto the ebb and flow of conquest had never embraced the whole of Central Asia at one time. States and principalities rose to greatness and declined according to the energy of their respective rulers, and no sooner did one individual assert superiority than neighbouring potentates combined for his overthrow. Foreign conquerors entered and settled, identified themselves with the land, and enjoyed periods of predominance before giving way to new blood or the military genius of a rival. But at the beginning of the thirteenth century the mighty Genghiz Khan rose out of obscurity and caused the whole world to tremble. His armies reduced all the states of Central Asia, and brought them under the ruthless rule of the Mongols. During the century after Genghiz Khan the Mongols remained predominant, but their empire was divided until Tamerlane once more united the various provinces, and from

his base at Samarcand invaded alternately Russia, Syria, and India, ultimately dying when marching to the conquest of China. The next great name associated with Central Asia is that of Baber, who, curiously enough, found the local leaders too strong for him, and was compelled to retire to Kabul, whence he afterwards successfully invaded India and founded the Moghul Empire. Finally, Nadir Shah, on his way back from India with the famous Peacock Throne and booty valued at £80,000,000 sterling, took Central Asia on the way to Persia, accepted the submission of Bokhara, and wiped out the Khan of Khiva. He was murdered in 1747, and thereafter nothing of consequence to the world in general happened in Central Asia until the advent of the Russian power.

Peter the Great was the first Russian monarch to interest himself in Central Asian affairs. He began by sending an embassy to the Khan of Khiva in 1703, his object being to enter into relations which should have the effect of checking the nomad robbers who harassed Russian trade with the newly settled territory of Western Siberia. The Khan, being pressed at the time by the Amir of Bokhara, placed himself under the suzerainty of Russia in return for protection against his enemy in the south. But the friendly Khan dying, his successor annihilated a Russian expedition and created a coldness which lasted until 1740, when Khiva once more submitted to Russian protection. Orenburg was fortified, and thenceforward the Russian frontier was steadily extended towards Central Asia, the reason chiefly being that insecure borders led to raids and incursions that rendered good government impossible in outlying provinces. But this phase of the Russian advance attracted little attention in Europe, for it affected regions inhabited by wandering tribes with no settled form of government, and of whom little was known.

But in 1848 the Russians marched up the Syr Daria and constructed Fort Perovsk, thereby intruding on territory that the Khan of Khokand regarded as under his protection. Desultory hostilities with Khokand continued until 1864, when Russia occupied Chimkent, and then Tashkent. Russia had now deeply penetrated into Central Asia, and there remained unsubdued only the constituted states known as the Khanates. Of these Bokhara took the initiative in 1865, and made an abortive attempt to eject the Power that threatened to overwhelm the civilised as well as the uncivilised portions of Turkestan. But every endeavour to check Russian advance gave occasion for further aggression, and in 1868 General Kaufman defeated the forces of Bokhara and Khiva, and occupied Samarcand, the holiest city in Central Asia. A treaty with the Amir of Bokhara gave Russia the rich valley of the Zerafshan, an indemnity, and the right of free trade in the state of Bokhara to Russian subjects. Khiva now became aggressive, and a Russian expedition sent from the Caspian in 1872 met with repulse, chiefly owing to the difficulties of the desert which had to be crossed ere a blow could be struck.

News of a further expedition caused disquietude in England, and Count Shouvaloff went to London in 1873 to assure the British Government that Russia had no intention of taking possession of Khiva. In the same year three Russian columns converged on Khiva, from Orenburg, Tashkent, and the Caspian, and the city capitulated after a brief fight. Under the terms of the treaty of peace half of the territory of the Khanate was ceded to Russia, a large war indemnity was stipulated for, and the Khan reduced to dependency. In 1875 the last of the Khanates was subdued, and Khokand declared a portion of the Russian Empire under its ancient name of Ferghana.

After the assurances given to Britain by Count Shouvaloff, the action of Russia at Khiva was regarded with great suspicion, which was not allayed by news of impending operations against Khokand. In November 1864 Prince Gortschakoff, the Russian Foreign Minister, had issued a circular to the Powers wherein he set forth the reasons which compelled Russia to advance her borders in Central Asia. He wrote:—

"The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised states which came into contact with half-savage, wandering tribes forming no fixed social organisation. It invariably happens in such cases that the interests of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations, compel the more civilised state to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbours whose turbulence and nomad instincts render them difficult to live with. First we have incursions and pillage to repress. In order to stop these we are compelled to reduce the tribes on our frontier to a more or less complete submission. Once this result is attained they become less troublesome; but in their turn they are exposed to the aggression of more distant tribes. The state is obliged to defend them against these depredations, and chastise those who commit them. Hence the necessity of distant and costly expeditions, repeated at frequent intervals, against an enemy whose social organisation enables him to elude pursuit. If we content ourselves with chastising the freebooters and then retire, the lesson is soon forgotten. Retreat is ascribed to weakness, for Asiatics respect only visible and palpable force; that arising from the exercise of reason and a regard for the interests of civilisation has as yet no hold on them. The task has therefore to be performed once again. . . . The United States in America, France in Algiers, Holland in her colonies, England in India,—all have been drawn into a course wherein ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity, and when the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop."

It is impossible to read those words without admitting their justice. Perhaps, too, it may suggest to the British

mind that if we, in our dealings with Indian frontier tribes, had as clearly comprehended a leading feature of Asiatic character, our frontier troubles would have been fewer and our position to-day more satisfactory than it is. Whether Russian actions in Central Asia have been entirely governed by the reasonable views set forth in Prince Gortschakoff's circular is quite another question, and one that could hardly be discussed without the support of much evidence. It has frequently been held in England that Russia's policy in Central Asia has been purely Machiavellian, and that the assurances of Shouvaloff and the statesmanlike declarations of Gortschakoff were merely so much dust thrown in our eyes to cover intentions totally different from those expressed. I do not believe that that view can be substantiated, and while it is obvious enough that Russian proceedings have not always coincided with professions, it is probable that diversions from declared policy have been no greater than those made by other states in like circumstances, or than have been often forced upon governments by hot-headed and ambitious subordinates far from control.

The Russian occupation of Central Asia was completed by the conquest of the Tekke Turkomans, who, based on Merv and the series of oases stretching along the northern slopes of the Kopet Dagh range, for hundreds of years had harried Persia and the Khanates. Skobeleff's success at Geok Tepe crushed the Turkomans, delivered Persia from a scourge, and gave the Russians a frontier marching with that of a settled and organised government. Merv gave way as a natural consequence, and an end was put to the Russian advance, for the Turkestan frontiers were now bounded by Persia, Afghanistan, and Chinese Turkestan, and the conditions realised which Prince Gortschakoff contended were the only logical limits to the extension of a civilised state.

The delimitation of the Afghan frontier by joint Russian and British Commissioners in 1885 gave rise to much dispute, and the scrimmage at Panjdeh between Russian and Afghan troops imperilled relations between ourselves and Russia to an extent that may be gauged by the fact that the House of Commons voted £11,000,000 for military preparations. We demanded the recall of General Komaroff, who was responsible for the breach of the peace, and the disavowal of his action. Both Russia and ourselves, however, were involved in other parts of the world at the time, and the prospect of war was welcome to neither. Diplomacy and tact averted an outbreak, and the respective Commissioners resumed work, with the result that the boundary question was finally settled at St Petersburg in 1888. With the exception of comparatively minor occurrences in the Pamirs, we have since had no differences with Russia in regard to Central Asia. Russia has held to her engagements and done a good deal to prove that her meteoric descent on the Khanates was due no more to ambition than to the necessity to reach natural frontiers beyond which existed settled and controllable elements.

I am far from denying that the magnetic influence of India has not helped to draw Russia into regions the occupation of which has cost her much money, and which are likely to cost her very much more before they reach a self-supporting stage. But the aggressive motive has been spasmodic, and chiefly consequent upon the ambition of the military party which every now and then gains ascendancy at St Petersburg. Besides, we ourselves are much to blame for the threatening attitude which Russia has several times adopted towards our position in India. Our querulous interrogatories addressed to St Petersburg about Russian intentions in Central Asia, when we were neither able nor willing to back our diplomacy by arms, was aptly termed

"Mervousness" by the wits of the day, and this condition of mind alone was sufficient to tempt Russia into taking advantage of it for political purposes. At the time when Russia was subjugating the Khanates she was no more able to invade India, with any prospect of success, than we are able to-day to send an expedition to Mars. Since the construction of railways in Central Asia, however, the situation has entirely altered, and although the conquest of India, in the writer's belief, is no more likely to-day than it ever was, it is unquestionable that we now have on our borders a Power that can bring its strength to bear upon India whenever it chooses.

Russian territory in Central Asia is officially known under the name of Turkestan, and its administration is in the hands of a Governor-General with headquarters at Tashkent, the capital town. Five provinces, Semirechia, Syr Daria, Ferghana, Samarcand, and Transcaspia, have military governors, and district officials in whom executive and police powers are vested. The native states of Bokhara and Khiva are nominally independent, and maintain their own armies much as do the native states of India. Residents at the courts of the Amir and the Khan take care of Russian interests, and generally keep an eye on the conduct of affairs.

The following table showing the relative statistics, in regard to population and acreage under cultivation, of the provinces mentioned and of the two native states, will give the reader some idea of the economic conditions of Turkestan. It will be observed that the cultivated area per person is less than an acre. Of the total under cultivation it has recently been estimated that 1,500,000 acres are under cotton, which leaves only two-thirds of an acre for the production of food for each person. But it has further been estimated that there are camels, horses, donkeys, and cattle in the country aggregating

3,000,000 in number, and all of which must at certain times be given a substantial feed of grain. Ten millions of sheep and goats, together with the animals named, have extensive pasture-land to feed upon, but as the camels, horses, and donkeys, numbering 2,000,000, are employed in transport work, it is obvious that they must consume a large proportion of the annual cereal output of the country :—

Province or State.	Population.	Acreage under cultivation.
Semirechia . . .	1,100,000	550,000
Syr Daria . . .	1,500,000	1,500,000
Ferghana . . .	1,600,000	2,500,000
Samarcand . . .	900,000	1,100,000
Transcaspia . . .	370,000	200,000
Bokhara . . .	2,500,000	1,000,000
Khiva . . .	500,000	550,000
Total .	8,470,000	7,400,000

The fact is that the recent pushing of cotton cultivation, on the part of the Russians, has led to a great reduction in the growing of food-stuffs, which have consequently advanced in price and made living extremely dear in Turkestan. Grain is now coming from the wheat-growing portions of Russia in the neighbourhood of Orenburg, and so supplying deficiencies where cotton-growing has resulted in a scarcity. From this economic situation an important deduction can be made. It proves that cultivation in Turkestan is not capable of sudden and indefinite extension to meet the new demand. The Russian colony has about it none of the agricultural possibilities of Canada or South Africa, and must be regarded as a possession that has been already thoroughly exploited from the agricultural point of view. The element lacking is water, and while cultivation is dependent upon irrigation no amount of labour can produce results unless backed by the precious fluid. In-

is its wine, to the merit of which, both red and white, I can personally attest. Samarcand brands are widely drunk in Central Asia, and I was told that no less than 300,000 gallons were manufactured last year.

Ferghana is one of the smaller, but is by far the richest, of the Turkestan provinces, boasting about 2½ millions of acres under cultivation, of which, I have been told, nearly 1 million are devoted to cotton. The province is practically the region formerly included within the borders of the Khanate of Khokand, and consists of the upper basin of the ancient Jaxartes, now the Syr Daria, with its parent rivers the Narin and Gulcha. It has much the most equable climate in Turkestan, cold in winter being moderate and heat in summer not insufferable. The broad valley watered by the Syr Daria, and innumerable streams from the flanking mountains, permit of wide stretches of irrigated land, while the rainfall is an important factor of the agricultural problem. The inhabitants are chiefly Sarts.

Next to Ferghana in wealth comes the provinces of Syr Daria, formed, as the name suggests, by the region bordering the great river. From the debouchure of the Syr Daria from the mountains of Ferghana to the Aral Sea is a distance of about 600 miles, all practically desert but for strips of cultivation on the river-banks. Owing to continuous wriggling the course of the river itself must be actually double the distance stated above, thereby allowing for cultivation extending over 1½ million acres. In summer the heat is intolerable, while in winter the river is frozen over for three months. Rainfall is practically nil. The population is nearly all Kirghiz, with a sprinkling of Sarts. Tashkent, with a population of 160,000, of which over 40,000 are Russians, is the capital of the province as well as being the seat of government for the whole country.

Semirechia, or the land of seven streams, has an area

of 150,000 square miles, with a population of about 1,000,000. It is a province of great importance to Russia, for it contains nearly 100,000 settlers, of whom 30,000 are Cossacks and 60,000 are peasants from Russia proper. These have steadily increased in number and wealth within recent years, and as the adult males all go through the military mill they constitute a valuable reserve on the spot in the event of complications. The Russian community grows cereals in large quantity, while the Kirghiz, who number three-fourths of the population, keep enormous herds of sheep and cattle. As its name indicates, Semirechia is a well-watered country, the rainfall measuring on an average 20 inches per annum. Its highland character and moderate climate render it highly suitable for European colonisation, and I understand the Russian population thrives in body and in pocket.

Of the two native states Khiva, shorn of territory after the Russian expedition of 1873, is much the smaller, measuring no more than 22,000 square miles, of which less than 4 per cent is cultivated. The history of this isolated state is full of romance, as indeed may be said of all Central Asian kingdoms. I forbear to inflict upon the long-suffering reader a full account of its vicissitudes, and will content myself with a few sentences extracted from a volume the authors of which combine erudition with a large share of journalistic perception. In the middle of the seventeenth century a Cossack band penetrated deeply into Central Asia, surprised Khiva in the absence of the Khan and his warriors, and returned homeward, "dragging with them a vast amount of booty and a thousand of the most beautiful inmates of Khivan harems." But "they were overtaken by the incensed husbands, and cut to pieces," which seems hard on the thousand of beautiful captives. Another Cossack raid was overtaken by winter on the

wind-swept shores of the Aral Sea, and reduced to such straits that they had "recourse to cannibalism," which thereafter caused the Cossacks to be known in many parts of Central Asia as the "Man-eaters." But for these and other disasters inflicted by the Khivans, the Russians took full revenge in 1873, when an army 14,000 strong stormed the capital, and reduced the Khan to vassalage. An indemnity of 2,500,000 roubles was included among the terms of peace, besides the cession of half the territory of the state. It is interesting to know that not a penny of the indemnity has ever been paid, and that Russia holds the debt over the head of the Khan as security for good behaviour. With internal affairs the Russians do not interfere, and the Khan still reigns as an absolute monarch, saving in foreign politics, which he is not allowed to touch. He maintains an army of 2000 men, and hacks off heads whenever he likes, thereby exercising that privilege which is dearest of all to the Oriental potentate.

Bokhara, with a population of 2½ millions, forms an important portion of the Russian dominions in Central Asia. Upon its earlier history I refrain from dilating, and will mention only those points which have direct interest for ourselves. In the year 1826, a younger son of a former ruler ascended the throne, and inaugurated a reign which, for viciousness and savage cruelty, has probably seldom been exceeded in the history of mankind. This monster was Nasrullah Khan, of whom Sir Henry Howarth, in his 'History of Bokhara,' gives an interesting account. Under his rule, however, the borders of Bokhara were considerably extended, and various minor states reduced to vassalage. Having watched the Russian advance into Central Asia, the British Government thought it well to establish a point of observation in that part of the world, and accordingly endeavoured to enter into relations with Nasrullah

Khan. Mr, afterwards the well-known Sir Alexander, Burnes was despatched on an unofficial mission in 1832, from which he returned without having been able to do anything, and from which, as it afterwards appeared, he was fortunate in escaping with his life. Colonel Stoddart of the Indian army was next despatched, and he was speedily consigned to a loathsome dungeon. Captain Conolly was afterwards sent to Turkestan with the object of uniting the Khanates in an informal alliance against Russia, and after failing with Khokand and Khiva Nasrullah Khan treacherously inveigled him into his clutches, when he was seized and robbed, and sent to join Stoddart in captivity.

In the same year, 1840, a Russian mission approached Nasrullah Khan, and though well received, nothing was effected. In 1841 Major Batanieff left Bokhara, having vainly interceded on behalf of the two English prisoners. The horrible disaster which overtook our arms in Afghanistan in 1842 sealed their fate. Stoddart was first beheaded, and then Conolly was offered his life on the condition of turning Mahomedan, which he declined to do. Besides these two, it is understood that seven other Englishmen suffered death at the hands of Nasrullah Khan, and, needless to say, they remain unavenged to this day. There now follows an interval of nearly thirty years, in which the Khanates watched the Russian advance with much alarm. Various endeavours were made to secure themselves, but neither individual effort nor combination stayed the impetuous representatives of the Tsar. In 1868 Kaufman completely subjugated Bokhara, since when the suzerainty of Russia has never been disputed. It must here be remarked that the Khanates gave plenty of excuse for aggressive measures, and also that subordinates frequently far outran instructions from St Petersburg.

The Bokhara of to-day is a place of great interest.

Though Russian posts and telegraphs exist in the state, and several thousands of Russians are resident in the capital, the process of Russification of the inhabitants has made small progress. The coinage is Bokharan, and a considerable army is locally recruited and officered by natives. It had been the intention of the Russian authorities to obtain the reduction of the army from some 15,000 to 3,000, but the Amir has always held out against the diminution of this emblem of power. Now it is said that the Russians are interesting themselves in the Bokharan army, with a view to making part of it efficient on the lines of our Imperial service troops in India. As it exists the Bokharan army is, of course, a rabble, worthy of being matched with the ragged levies of any Indian Rajah. Bokhara has a considerable trade with Afghanistan, Persia, and Russia, estimated to total nearly £4,000,000. The present Amir is a General in the Russian army and A.D.C. to the Tsar, while his son and heir is, or was, a lieutenant in a Cossack regiment. Education is purely Mahomedan, and justice patriarchal, and including barbarous treatment of criminals. The administration is entirely in the hands of natives, except in the cases of a few districts bordering on the Afghan frontier, where Russian officials have unostentatiously taken over control.

CHAPTER XXX.

MILITARY STRENGTH.

On the subject of the Russian advance into Central Asia there exists a literature both interesting and comprehensive, and only in one respect is our information defective with regard to Muscovite doings in Transcaspian regions. Many general statements of the Russian military strength in Western Turkestan have been made in recent years, but none of the more reliable writers has attempted to give complete details regarding the number of troops or their location. Prior to the outbreak of the war in the Far East very few travellers of British nationality had traversed Russian territory in Central Asia, and of those none, so far as I am aware, gave to the world an estimate of the garrison. The declaration of war between Russia and Japan—the latter an ally of ourselves—had the effect of rendering Central Asian travel more difficult than before to British subjects, and also gave rise to alarmist reports regarding the massing of troops where their presence, if these reports were correct, could have no other object than the menacing of the strategic frontier of India.

It was obvious that trouble with Japan might spread until the ally of Japan was involved, and in the beginning of 1904 the Russian garrison of Central Asia was slightly augmented as a precautionary measure. From the tabular statement it will be seen that to bring the forces in

RUSSIAN TROOPS IN CENTRAL ASIA.

Station of troops.	Infantry.	Cavalry.	Artillery.						Sappers.	Strength in men.		
			Horse.	Field.	Mountain.	Howitzer.	Fortress.	Field guns.		Peace.	War.	
	Batts.	Squads.	Bats.	Bats.	Bats.	Bats.	Coys.		Batts.			
Tashkent	6	6	...	3	...	...	1	24	1	7,500	16,500	1st Turkestan Army Corps. Headquarters, Tashkent, say —28,000 men and 60 guns.
Samarcand	4	4	...	1	1	...	1	16	...	5,100	9,700	
Termez	4	...	1	...	...	...	1	6	...	3,690	4,200	
Margilan	2	8	...	1	1 (horse)	...	1	14	...	3,650	7,800	
Katta Kurgan	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,016	1,227	
Osh	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,016	1,227	
Andijan	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,016	1,227	
Khokand	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,016	1,227	
Askabad	5	6	...	1	1	...	...	16	...	5,500	10,100	2nd Turkestan Army Corps. Headquarters, Askabad, say —22,000 men and 52 guns.
Merv	3	6	...	1	...	...	...	8	1	4,196	8,474	
Kerki	2	4	...	2	...	...	1	16	...	2,850	3,156	
Kushk	2	...	...	...	...	...	3	...	...	2,372	6,353	
Charjui	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	833	982	
Petro Alexandrovsk	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	980	1,130	
Sarakhs	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	812	982	
Krasnovodsk	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	905	4,833	
Kungrad	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	148	147	
Kaakha	...	...	1	...	...	1	...	12	...	358	480	
Vernoye	2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1 coy.	1,060	2,280	Garrison of Semirechia, say — 4000 men and 12 guns.
Jarkand	1	12	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	2,500	2,990	
Kopal	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	469	982	
Prejevalsk	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	8	...	240	240	
2 Battalions of Railway Engineers scattered along the line										3,200	3,200	
Kushk Field Railway Company and Kushk Transport Company										430	430	
2 Squadrons of Irregular Turkoman Cavalry stationed at Askabad										300	300	
2 Brigades of Frontier Guards scattered along the Persian and Afghan frontiers										2,300	2,300	
Pontoon and Telegraph Companies at Termez and Balloon Company at Tashkent										730	730	
Several small bodies of locally raised troops										1,600	1,600	
Artillery Parks variously located										2,000	4,500	
Totals										57,787	99,247	

ARAL SEA
KUNGRAD
OREN BURG TASH KENT RAIL WAY
SEMIRECHIA
PETRO ALEXANDROVSK
KHIVA
CASPIAN
KRASNOVODSK
RUSSIAN
OXUS
TASHKENT
KHOKAND
ANDIJAN
OSH
MARGILAN
CHINESE TURKESTAN
BOKHARA
KATTA KURGEN
CHERNIEVO
SAMARKAND
TRANSCASPIAN RAILWAY
TEJEND RIVER
CHARJUI
TURKESTAN
SEA
KARSHI
ASKABAD
MERV
KAAKHA
OXUS
KERKI
TERMEZ
OXUS
MURGHAB RIVER
SARAKHS
MAZAR-I-SHARIF
CHITRAL
PERSIA
MESHED
AFGHANISTAN
GILGIT
INDIA
KUSKH
KABUL
HERAT
PESHAWAR
Map showing Central Asian Railways & Garrison Towns in Russian Turkestan
SCALE 100 MILES = 1 INCH.

Turkestan up to war strength an increase of 40,000 men from the reserve is necessary. Of these, about half were available from the settled Russian community in Central Asia, and as they were practically already on the spot, they were not called upon. The rest, however, were actually brought from Russia and attached to their respective battalions, a proportion of which were thus brought up to war strength. It was, however, quickly realised that the belligerents were to be allowed to fight it out alone, without the intervention of other European Powers; whereupon Russia ceased to reinforce the garrison of Turkestan. The maximum number of troops was reached in the spring of 1904, and probably never exceeded 75,000. By the summer of the same year the war complements brought from Russia were absorbed in the regular establishments, and the total had sunk to the original level of some 60,000. At no subsequent period has the garrison of Central Asia been augmented, and the wild statements that obtained currency in 1905 may be dismissed as not worth examination. Having traversed the forbidden land, it may be interesting if I record my observations on the military situation. As an amateur, I offer them to military readers with as much of journalistic diffidence as I can summon up, and only claim for them the merit of being up-to-date as far as they go.

The accompanying table, giving the stations and strength of the various cantonments in Russian Turkestan, is the first detailed statement of the kind that has been published. The figures have been gleaned from confidential Russian documents, and translated for me by a friend with an intimate knowledge of the Russian language. The manner in which they were obtained precludes the possibility of their having been specially compiled for the confusion of the inquisitive, and in publishing the table I have no hesitation in stating that it is a correct analysis of the forces in Turkestan in 1906. Naturally, it would be impossible to collect such a mass

of figures by personal observation, unless unlimited time were available, as well as the opportunity to visit all the places mentioned. But throughout my journey I lost no opportunity of inquiring the number of troops at various places; and though I frequently got answers giving much smaller figures than those stated in the table, I never once was told numbers in excess. When, for instance, three Russian officers on separate occasions told me that there was one battalion at Osh, and when I arrived there and saw one regiment, the number of which corresponds with that in the detailed list in my possession, it is reasonable to conclude that my information is at least well-founded. And having driven all round the town of Osh and its environs, and seen no soldiers other than those belonging to the same battalion, and barracks sufficient to accommodate no more than 1000 men, it is surely justifiable to feel satisfied that observation has confirmed the accuracy of information obtained otherwise. From confirmation of this kind, gathered at several different points, I thus conclude that my table is worthy of trust. On several occasions I asked Russians what was the total number of troops in Turkestan, and invariably got an answer indicating a smaller number than set forth in the table. The discrepancy, I imagine, is due to their omitting to include the garrison of Semirechia, and, in part, to the well-understood fact that the establishments have recently fallen below strength. My figures, of course, represent strength on paper.

The tabulated figures being set forth in such detail, there is not much to be added to them. It is noticeable that the bigger army corps is not the one nearest the most vulnerable point on the Afghan frontier, whilst the garrison of Kushk itself is no more than two battalions of infantry. At the same time, Kushk is equipped with special railway and transport corps, evidently organised with the express object of operating from there. The

station of fortress companies indicates the points where siege-trains are maintained. The fact that Kushk has three companies, numbering 650 men, argues that a large number of guns are stored there. There is not necessarily any relation between the number of the guns and the present establishments, for the objects of the latter are merely to keep batteries in order, and to form a nucleus on mobilisation. What may be safely concluded is that the great bulk of the heavy artillery is old-fashioned, and that the Turkestan armies are no better provided in this respect than were the Manchurian armies.

The Frontier Guards are composed of conscripts, and are considered to belong to the regular army, though their work in peace is to patrol frontiers, and guard frontier posts in the interest of the Customs Department. The Turkoman irregulars are a small body of natives recruited in the Akhel Tekke district, and designed to watch the marauding tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions forming the boundary between Turkestan and North-eastern Persia. I visited their barracks at Askabad and found them well-armed and well-mounted, but decidedly inferior, I should say, in all respects to our native Indian cavalry. Being recruited from the daring robber people who used to live by making forays from Merv into the interior of Persia, they are expert as horsemen and horse-masters, and should prove valuable as scouts to an army in the field. In the table it may be observed that there is no mention of the posts on the Pamirs. As the total number of men detailed for frontier duty does not exceed 1000, and as they are all detached from units included in the table, I have not thought it worth while to complicate my figures by mentioning them. Nor have I thought it necessary to mention detachments of various regiments of cavalry, such as a half squadron each at Kushk and Panjdeh.

To comprehend the value of railways as a factor in the

military situation in Turkestan, it is necessary to know something of the nature of that country. Many descriptions of the physical and topographical features of Russian Central Asian territory have been written, and it is not necessary to do more than briefly summarise the conditions. From Krasnovodsk on the Caspian to Kaakha, where the railway strikes away from the Persian border, the country is continuous desert, dotted with a line of oases. In the neighbourhood of all of these oases it is possible to obtain water, but in practice the Russians find that distillation works on the shores of the Caspian, and the transport of the water therefrom, is the cheapest and most effective method of supplying many sections of the railway. Between Kaakha and Charjui on the Oxus, the railway crosses the Tejend and Murghab rivers, so that in a distance of 250 miles there are three sources of water-supply. But in between the points named there is nothing but desert, and every drop of water required between must be transported. North of the railway and west of the Oxus there is the Karakum desert, a region practically impassable to troops. Beyond the Oxus, as far as Samarcand, a certain amount of water is available, but the greater part needed at intermediate points has to be carried on the railway. The parallelogram of country bounded by a section of the Transcaspian railway, the Tejend and Oxus rivers, and a section of the Afghan frontier, is also desert scored by the three rivers Tejend, Murghab, and Oxus, at intervals so wide as to make the water difficulty of supreme importance. On account of the water-supply alone, then, the transport of an army large enough to menace the Afghan frontier would be practically impossible from the side of the Caspian if this railway were taken away.

East of the Oxus conditions are different, but the effect on marching armies would be very much the same. The grand difficulty would be water, were it not for the

existence of the railway. The section between Samarcand and Tashkent has to be supplied artificially at many points. Between Tashkent and Orenburg the railway generally runs through country across which an important army could not march without most expensive and elaborate arrangements for water-supply.

In effect, the Transcaspian and Orenburg-Tashkent railways have bridged regions that otherwise would have been impracticable to forces of magnitude sufficient seriously to threaten the Indian frontier. I have referred to the water difficulty alone, but a modern army has other requirements that are equally important to its fighting value. In ancient times we see that armies made wonderful marches over deserts and mountains, and struck at their objective with undiminished vigour. But the very factor in modern warfare which has rendered a modern army so powerful a machine has completely ruined its mobility. The rifles and ordnance that have revolutionised the art of war entail a supply of ammunition that animal transport cannot provide except from railheads in the immediate rear. If a really large army attempted in these days to advance without railway communications, the number of animals employed would be so enormous, and their victualling so difficult, that the advance would be reduced to a snail's pace. Telegraphing is another factor that has caused important modification in the conditions of warfare, for news of a slow-moving host would reach the enemy and give time for preparation. The essence of Napoleon's march over the Alps was the suddenness with which he descended upon the Austrians. If there had been telegraphs, surprise would have been out of the question.

Indeed, it would be impossible to over-estimate the degree in which railway communication is indispensable to Russian designs against India—if such exist. Without railways in Central Asia, Russia would be entirely impotent even to threaten our borders. But the corollary

holds good—and herein lies the kernel of the whole question. Granted railways, Russia can place upon the Afghan frontier armies of dimensions limited only by the carrying capacity of the railways that have been constructed. When we know what a single line many thousands of miles long did for Manchuria, it is impossible to ignore that the railway communication between Russia and Central Asia has twice the capacity, and is only one-third of the length of the Siberian railway. Such accommodation enables Russia to concentrate in Central Asia whenever she chooses an army big enough to engage in a struggle that no one acquainted with our military resources could contemplate with equanimity. What political or economic considerations may restrain a Russian advance are, of course, outside the purview of these remarks; what is evident to the traveller in Central Asia is that the present garrison is a factor of small importance, and that the railway system is the supreme factor in any schemes which may exist for the conquest of India.

The railway question may easily be comprehended by a glance at the map. From Krasnovodsk on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, to Orenburg in the extreme south-east of Russia proper, extends a single line measuring 2300 miles in length. From Merv on the main railway depends a branch line terminating at Kushk. From Cherniyevo on the main line another branch runs to Andijan. The significance of the system lies in the fact that it is directly connected with the railway systems of European Russia, and that troops from any part of the empire can be railed and landed directly upon the Afghan border. Orenburg is the point of junction between the railway systems of Russia proper and the Trans-Siberian railway, so that the new line to Tashkent not only brings European Russia into touch with Central Asia, but forms a link with the Far East. Krasnovodsk on the Caspian has steamer communication with Baku, which is in direct

railway communication with Moscow, and is also connected by rail with Batoum on the Black Sea. Krasnovodsk is thus within a day's journey of the large Russian garrison in the Caucasus, as well as being conveniently connected with Russia proper. Taking Merv as the centre of military possibilities in Central Asia, we find that it is distant from Moscow by the Orenburg-Tashkent line 2700 miles, and by the Caspian Sea route 2200 miles.

The history of railway enterprise in Central Asia is well known, and the briefest reference to the sequence of events will be sufficient. When the Russians found themselves masters of all the region under discussion except the belt of country between Kizil Arvat and Kaakha, inhabited by the Tekke Turkomans, they sent an expedition from the Caspian to put an end to the freebooting life which these people led, to the detriment of commerce throughout Central Asia. General Lomakin, however, failed in his attempt at their reduction, chiefly owing to the transport difficulties. The famous Skobeleff was then employed, and at Geok Tepe in 1881 he achieved a brilliant victory, and wrested from the Turkomans both their independence and their country. Not a little of his success was due to a tramway, which proved an invaluable auxiliary means of transport, and provided the troops with water from a distilling establishment on the shore of the Caspian. Immediately the Turkoman business was settled, the tram-line was superseded by a proper railway of the standard Russian gauge, 5 feet. Construction was pushed forward at a great pace, and in 1881 the line was completed to Kizil Arvat. In 1885 a further extension was decided upon, and by the end of 1886 Charjui on the Oxus had been reached. In 1888 the line was advanced to Samarcand. In 1895 work was commenced upon extensions to Tashkent and Andijan, which were completed in 1899. In 1897-98 the Kushk branch was constructed, thereby

apparently putting the climax to Russian railway ambition.

But not so. In 1900 the Tsar gave his consent to the Orenburg-Tashkent line, in 1901 it was commenced, in 1904 the Governor-General traversed it from terminus to terminus, and in 1905 it was opened to public traffic. Measuring 1150 miles in length, and costing over £12,000,000 to construct, this line has an importance both economic and strategic which it would be difficult to over-estimate. Strategically, it more than doubles Russian facilities for despatching troops to Central Asia, and for supplying them in the field. Its economic value requires some explanation. The leading feature of Russian commercial policy in Turkestan has been the extension of cotton cultivation, the object being the supersession of the import of the raw material from America. But cultivation in Turkestan is limited by the water-supply, and it was soon discovered that over-production of cotton led to shortness in the food-supply, and consequent reversion from cotton to grain cultivation. The new railway corrects this difficulty by bringing into touch with the cotton-growing country the eastern grain-growing districts of Russia proper. Cotton is gradually superseding cereal cultivation, and Turkestan begins to be dependent upon Russia for food, the economic exchange furnishing work for the railway, and possibly a dividend in the future. Nor must it be overlooked that the dependence of Turkestan on Russia for food, and for a market for her new product, has political significance of some importance.

Some consideration of the quality of the Central Asian railways is necessary, for they are far from being up to European standard. To begin with, the rails are light, and weigh only 65 lb. to the yard, as against 80 or 90 commonly in use on first-class railways. These rails, again, are only spiked to the sleepers in a manner that compares very unfavourably with the chairs that

give stability to rails on European lines. These two characteristics are great drawbacks to speed or to heavy traffic, which could be effected only at great expense in repairs and serious enhancement of deterioration in material. The ballasting of the line from Krasnovodsk is by no means good, for it is often sand or fine gravel, which tends to be shaken away from the sleepers. The absence of rigidity consequent on the light rails, the inferior method of fixing to the sleepers, and the character of the ballast, all result in "work" which shortens the life of both rails and sleepers, and effectually prevents that heavy traffic which is constantly borne by well-constructed lines.

It has to be remembered, too, that the carrying capacity of the Central Asian railways is subject to a handicap under which few other railways labour. As explained in an earlier part of this chapter, water is the grand difficulty, and the fact that large portions of the railway have no natural supply and have to be provided for by tanks carried on trucks, greatly reduces the net capacity for traffic. The liquid fuel universally used by the engines is also a serious matter, and it has been estimated that 20 per cent of the total carrying capacity of the railway in time of war would be absorbed by the necessity to supply water and fuel throughout the line.

He is a bold prophet who would predict the powers of the Central Asian railways in time of war. Present traffic is no criterion, for it is small, and no tax on the resources. Stations are about fifteen miles apart, and even the smallest have double sidings, which in time of traffic pressure could be used for pairs of trains. If occasion arose to employ the railway to its full extent, presumably pairs of trains would be run, one immediately behind the other. Theoretically, a pair would be despatched from the terminus every two hours, and the run to the next station would occupy an hour. But

for every loaded pair of trains going to the front an empty pair must return, and so the loaded pair would have to wait an hour on the double sidings at the first station until the empties came along and gave them a clear run to the second station. Meanwhile the first lot of empties encountered at the first station would be running to the terminus, where on their arrival the second pair of loaded trains could be despatched along the now open line. In this manner twenty-four trains a day would arrive at railhead.

But in practice it would be impossible to make everything fit in so neatly, because the character of the line in various sections is different and would entail different speeds, besides which the distance between stations is not uniform. Again, the speed necessary to maintain the imaginary schedule would be fifteen miles an hour, and that with a heavy military train on a light and badly ballasted line could hardly be kept up continuously. Probably instead of despatching a pair every two hours it would be found that an interval of four hours would be necessary, thus reducing the daily arrivals at railhead from twenty-four to twelve trains. But in order to overcome the drawback of a single line, and the continual necessity for side-tracking empties returning to make way for loaded trains, the Russians have instituted sidings between stations. These are always double, for the accommodation of trains in pairs, and occur throughout the line at every ten versts or so, as on the Siberian railway. These sidings really double the capacity for traffic, and in practice doubtless they would enable the number of daily trains to be increased by 50 per cent, or from twelve trains to eighteen per day. As this process could be maintained from both Krasnovodsk and Orenburg, the total arrivals at the point of concentration would be thirty-six trains per day.

Many other factors, however, enter into the consideration of traffic capacity. To maintain despatches huge

loading accommodation is necessary, and even greater accommodation at the point of concentration. Unlimited rolling-stock must be available, and particularly engines powerful enough to do the work required. Then night-work at the points of embarkation and debarkation would be essential, thus adding to the necessary organisation. In all these matters the Central Asian railway is deficient at present, but presumably Russia would not commence concentration without preliminary preparation. Making full allowances for the difference between theory and practice, it is difficult to doubt that it would be thoroughly practicable to run fifteen trains a day each from Krasnovodsk and Orenburg, and it is quite possible that that number could be exceeded. Making allowance for the necessity to supply groceries to the European population of Turkestan, to supply liquid fuel throughout the line, and water at many points, it remains that the number of trains available for purely military purposes would be from twenty-four to thirty per day. A train will carry, roughly, any of the following units, with horses, guns, &c., but exclusive of field transport—

1 battalion infantry;
1 battery artillery;
1½ squadrons cavalry; or,
300 tons supplies.

The reader can thus see for himself what are the potentialities of the Central Asian railways. They are, in fact, equal to the transport of a huge army from Russia, and for its maintenance in the field.

These calculations are based on the capacity of the main lines, and provide only for concentration at Merv or some other strategic point. Actually to throw upon the Afghan border the troops thus brought to Central Asia the Merv-Kushk branch would not be adequate, for its capacity, including stations and sidings, is no more than that of either of the main lines. It would be

essential to a serious invasion of Afghanistan that the present railway communication should be increased. The Merv-Kushk line can deal with the troops and supplies reaching Merv from Krasnovodsk. To keep pace with the arrivals from Orenburg another point of concentration would have to be established and another line of advance chosen. For this purpose two points have been mentioned, Charjui and Samarcand. It has been proposed to run a branch line from Charjui along the banks of the Oxus to Termez, which would form a base of operations against Mazar-i-Shariff and Kabul. An alternative route to Termez is from Samarcand, *viâ* Karshi and Kilif. The former scheme is supposed to have been dropped in favour of the latter, leaving Charjui as a base for a flotilla of shallow-draught steamers which ply as far up the Oxus as Termez. These steamers belong to the Amu Daria Flotilla Company, have very small capacity, and take about ten days to reach Termez owing to the difficulties of navigation.

The Samarcand-Termez extension would seem to be a natural consequence of the Orenburg-Tashkent line, and its construction doubtless awaits only upon financial considerations. At present no rails are laid, though I have been told the ground has been partially prepared in the vicinity of Samarcand. Resumption of work with a view to extension to Termez is fraught with great political significance. It is extremely improbable that any southward movement would be attempted while this branch remains incomplete, and whether Russian aggressiveness is dead, or only sleeping, will be infallibly indicated by the progress of events in respect of the Termez line. At present the project, as far as I could gather, is dead, and has ceased to be a subject of conversation in Central Asia, though at one time the matter was eagerly discussed, and the construction of the line supposed to foreshadow military activity in the near future.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RAILWAY JOURNEY.

THE desertion of my little conscript friend, and the unsympathetic logic of Governor-General Matsievski, combined to subdue the spirits and egotism that afflict the traveller newly arrived upon fresh ground. I had forgotten the toil over the mountains, the vicissitudes of the desert, and the other hardships which, having been successfully endured, fill a man with honest and conscious pride. Nobody seemed to want me in Tashkent, I couldn't speak a word of the language, and there was no comfort to be found in the whole town. So I returned to my bedroom at the Grand Hotel, sat down with some forlornness, and waited for something to happen. It did very quickly.

Saduk burst into the room, broke into loud lamentation, and fell at my feet, his body convulsed with irrestrainable sobbing.

"*Hamara bap murghia*!"—my father is dead—he wept.

Saduk's home was in Yarkand, a full thousand miles away, and his father, mother, and all the usual senior relations had been dead many years; moreover, there was no possible means of communication with Yarkand. So I knew that Saduk was languishing in a foreign land. I dismissed him on the spot, with less buksheesh than he would have got if he had stuck to me as far as Persia,

as he had agreed. If the heart of a native is elsewhere, his body is worth nothing to anybody. Nevertheless I parted with this last link between myself and the happy experiences of the past, and found myself alone in Russia. How much alone the reader does not yet understand. In the Grand Hotel no single soul could speak French, or English, or German, or any language of which I knew even one word. If I asked for anything the waiter gaped at me, if I went to a little restaurant in the hotel they all ran away, for they had the childishness to be afraid of abuse in Hindustani. If I went out and hailed a carriage I could not tell the man where to drive to, and if I went into a shop to ask for cigarettes they brought vodka, salt herrings — anything but what I wanted. Saduk's cheery and familiar figure gone, I was indeed a pitiable object, miserably conscious of my own condition.

But as the shades of night darkened my lonely room I felt that if I remained in this state of dejection much longer the end of me would be a Russian madhouse. I arose and went out into the street, and wandered along until I came to a bookseller's. There I gazed longingly at volumes the backs of which bore only the Russian hieroglyphics. But suddenly my eyes encountered the Roman character, and I realised that I was gazing upon a Tauchnitz. This decided me.

I marched into the shop and was met by a girl—an angel I ought to have said, for she had eyes like turquoises and a halo of hair that glowed like living gold. With the serenity of a Madonna she spoke to me, and I could only stammer the word "English." That made her smile, and then I knew she was only seventeen and full of fun. We soon got to business with a pencil and a piece of paper. The next step was an Anglo-Russian dictionary, by means of which we had a delightful conversation, slow in the exchange of ideas perhaps—but then I was

in no hurry. I bought some books and, by her advice, a conversation-book. I turned over the leaves of this looking for a suitable sentiment, but found them all either far too watery or much too affectionate. She had been so charming and obliging, however, and our acquaintanceship waxed so speedily, that I felt I must say something, and accordingly I placed my finger on a Russian sentence against which stood, "My dear friend, I love you very much." I was a little doubtful about the result, but I need have had no qualms, for she beamed at me, turned the book round, and pointed both her forefingers at the equivalent of those very English words just quoted. Then a man came out of an inside door, pushed the girl aside, and assumed conduct of the proceedings. Not to my taste, the reader may be sure, but I left that shop a new man, nerved afresh by the knowledge that in this foreign city existed at least one kind soul.

How to persuade the Grand Hotel that I had made up my mind to fly away was a problem. But having packed all my kit, I went out into the street and hailed a carriage. I led the driver into my room by the hand and pointed to the luggage. With an intelligence rare in a Russian he understood and commenced loading up. It was only when my evacuation was almost complete that my bill was brought. I knew by the amount that I was being done, but as I could neither read the items nor maintain a discussion I contented myself with adding up to see if the total was correct. It was only 50 kopecks wrong, which I considered wonderfully accurate, seeing that Russians do all their counting with the abacus, like the Chinese. This instrument I had known in my kindergarten days, and its presence in all Russian shops and on the desks of Russian officials, high and low, stirred ancient memories, besides testifying to the simplicity of intellect in a people who, apparently, are incapable of mental arithmetic. The clerk in the hotel whanged the

marbles backward and forward upon the wires, but professed himself unable to find an error. But as every Scot is a banker by instinct, I trusted my own mensuration and would pay only the minor sum.

After a quarrel at the station with the gharry-wallah, which attracted a large crowd, I got a yellow-bearded, white-aproned porter and placed my luggage in his hands, besides money to get my ticket to Askabad. Then I retired to the refreshment-room to dine, my friend the conversation-book ready for action. I have vague recollections of what I ate, but very distinct memories of my difficulties. None of the waiters could read their own language, and though they said the things I asked for were not procurable, I knew they were deceiving me, for they generally held the book the wrong way up. While dealing with the waiters, my porter came in and gave me a handful of change upon a very old, dirty, and greasy piece of paper. Eight roubles appeared to be the cost, which seemed very little money for travelling 800 miles, even second-class. After much discussion I came to understand that this was an old ticket from Moscow to Askabad, the original holder of which had evidently stopped short at Tashkent.

The proper fare was about treble the money, and I did not like the position at all. But disputation was impossible, besides which my porter darted off to take up a strong position opposite the waiting train, which was not yet opened to the public. I had decided to travel second-class, as there one sees more life, first-class in Russia being avoided except by a few of the wealthy. I was taking a good deal of luggage into the carriage, but there were two big and heavy boxes intended for the van, and for which I expected to pay stiffly. After a period of waiting the doors were opened, and everybody crushed into the narrow corridors until a complete block

existed. My porter gave it up as a bad job, struggled out of the *mêlée*, and entered into the quiet haven of a first-class carriage, where he triumphantly bestowed my belongings. Then he went back to have my heavy luggage weighed and deposited in the luggage van. But there was a great crush at the luggage office, and as starting-time approached I began to get anxious. So did my porter, for he suddenly abandoned the idea of weighing and paying, and brought my boxes into the carriage, one compartment of which now became completely choked. In a first-class carriage, with a very suspicious second-class ticket, and with enough luggage for a bride, I felt that anything might happen at any moment. I saw in all this a design of the police—having proved me a swindler and a rogue, they would arrest me, cast me into prison, and my sorrowing creditors would never even know that I had been tried before a drumhead and done to death by a squad of Cossacks.

The train moved out of the station before anybody took any notice of me. When the ticket people came round I felt anxiety, but endeavoured to appear easy and genial. They turned my ticket up and down, backward and forward, discussed it under the light of a strong lantern, and collected all the train officials. Several times they spoke to me, but I just smiled and asked if they could *parlez-vous*. In this subtle way I suggested that I was French, without in any way denying my nationality. They marvelled greatly at my kit, and I feared they would begin to search for bombs. They all tried talking to me, each individual appearing to think it only required persuasiveness to make me speak. In reply I flung at them bits of French, Hindustani, Chinese, and Thibetan, and then they gave it up in despair and left me alone. I spent a most comfortable night, dreamt of turquoises and living gold, and in the morning awoke to find the train nearing Samarcand.

Alas! that I had to pass by Samarcand, as also Bokhara, Merv, the famous Oxus, and several other places whose names at one time were spoken with bated breath throughout the length and breadth of Asia. Of the journey there is little to relate, for from the carriage windows there was nothing visible but desert. Now and again there is an oasis to gladden the eye, but these are only drops of green in an illimitable ocean of sand. My chief amusement was paying visits to the restaurant car, in which terrible culinary experiences befel me. The waiters were unable to read my conversation-book, and I would have starved but for good Samaritans who took pity on me. When it came to payment I was entirely in the hands of the Philistines, for all I could do was hold out a handful of coin and let the fellow take what he listed. The agony of such a proceeding every brither Scot will understand. Besides the dining car there were other sources of nourishment. At every station there stood a row of bare-headed Russian women who offered comestibles to the traveller. Roasted chickens, bread, eggs, grapes, and melons seemed to be the staples, while all had a hissing samovar from which you could fill a teapot for five kopecks. Nearly all the passengers carried their own teapots, and a fur-coated, diamond-ringed autocrat had no shame in jostling a peasant or a native in the endeavour to secure a fill of the boiling liquid.

It was interesting to observe the manner in which the Russians treated the inhabitants of the country. A number of natives travelling by the train, and evidently strangers to the habits of Europeans, wandered up and down the corridors taking stock of the Aryan brother—if we are so related. Some were second- and some third-class passengers, but they had no hesitation in intruding upon their betters, and mingling their tobacco and their saliva where it could hardly have been completely wel-

come. Imagine such a thing in India or America! But no Russian had any thought of objecting, even when the native dumped down beside him in a vacant seat and good-naturedly offered to shake hands and talk. It was quite clear that the natives must find the Russian perfectly harmless, else the taking of such liberties, as we would deem it in India, would not be possible. At one station a long-robed Sart got into the train with a second-class ticket, and as there was no room for him the conductor brought him into the first-class carriage and found a berth for him, to the inconvenience of several Russians, including an officer. I remarked to a man whom I discovered could speak a little French that we did not treat natives like that in India. He replied, grumblingly, that the railway officials were far more attentive to natives than they were to Russians. The railway regulations urge civility to natives, doubtless with the immediate object of making travel popular, and with the political object of making the Russian *régime* as unobnoxious as possible.

It remains, however, that the natural attitude of the Russian towards the native is not in the least aggressive. The peasant regards himself on an equal footing, while the officer is good-naturedly tolerant of an individual of a different social standing. In India the attitude of the Englishman toward the Indian is often one of ill-concealed contempt, an attitude which stands in strong contrast to that of the Russian in Turkestan. On the other hand, when a safe opportunity offers, the Russian will tyrannise over and rob the weaker vessel in a manner totally repugnant to British ideas. The key-note of our rule in India is justice, while that of Russia in Central Asia might be termed tolerance. In effect, the native of India gets absolute security of life, rights, and property, coupled with the knowledge that the ruler regards the ruled as beneath him. The native of Central Asia gets no great security for anything,

but finds his master more of a neighbour than a conqueror. That the Russians are far more acceptable personally to the natives of Turkestan than are the British to the natives of India I have no hesitation in saying. But the native states of India are as certain of the maintenance of the *status quo* as is the individual native that his life, his property, and his liberty are protected by sound law scrupulously administered. The native states of Turkestan, however, will be swallowed up by Russia, regardless of engagements, at whatever moment it suits the Russian Government, while communities are liable to ruin or even destruction in furtherance of Russian policy. Wherever Russia goes she goes for the benefit of Russia, and no individual claims prevent her statesmen working for what they believe to be the good of the state. Our statesmen aim at precisely the same object, but they are hampered by valetudinarian supporters who think that everything with two legs and a loud voice has a soul, and is therefore entitled to a vote. This view may further the advance of humanity as a whole, but it is fatal to the welding of a state.

We do a great deal for the native of India in a conspicuously disagreeable manner, while the Russian does very little for his native in a comparatively pleasant manner. The sensible native will see on which side his bread is buttered, but the true Oriental will hanker after, not the Russian fleshpots, but any condition of affairs under which he will feel less of a worm. Russia and England at present are firmly seated in the Orient, Russia more or less at home, England an exotic. Who will endure the longer only time can show.

I hear some patriot loudly differing from my view of the British attitude towards the native of India. I may not have chosen the best words to express my ideas on the subject, but I take it that all who have seen Asia

from end to end will know what I mean, even if they do not agree. If the dissenter's experience of the East is confined to a knowledge of India alone, I put him out of court. Having lived seven fascinating years in India, I left it with the unsatisfying consciousness that it is never given to the Occidental quite to understand the Oriental. Wandering in many lands has since taught me to recognise that the Oriental outlook upon life is not to be despised—as it is despised in India. When one travels in America one ceases to wonder that the Chinese call us foreign devils, and when one reads about the suffragettes it makes one blush to imagine what the Hadjis of Turkestan would think of such goings-on. Travelling in Asia often makes one feel very humble about Europe.

The railway journey itself was devoid of incident worth recording. I have already spoken of the animated scrap-heaps which in Transcaspia are called engines. The one that hauled my train from Merv became greatly exhausted in the course of the journey, and dropped to a speed of five miles an hour, which it maintained, with three intervals for rest, with admirable perseverance throughout the greater part of the day. During stoppages the passengers used to get out and give advice to the engine-driver, who bore a worn look. Instead of reaching Askabad at two in the afternoon, we were many miles away at that hour. As darkness gathered, all the first-class passengers collected in my compartment to converse. It had spread round the train that I was a modern Marco Polo, and knew things not often vouchsafed to human comprehension. Men who in daylight shook their heads at French grew bold in the dusk, and with much travail gave birth to sentences that would have caused tetanus in any Parisian who might have heard them.

They asked me how long I had been travelling, where

I had been travelling, and how much I got paid for it. My reply to the last query made them all sit up, and one listener asked me how was I ever able to spend so much money. I said I gave a great deal away to the poor, which elicited a murmur of approbation. The questioning soon brought out the fact that I had been in Manchuria, whereupon there was a general chorus of inquiry as to whether I had been there during the war. To nice-minded readers it may seem that the subject of the war was delicate ground. But the Russians are not in the least sensitive in this connection, for they all regard the defeat by the Japanese as being inflicted on a rascally and idiotic Government, and not on the nation as a whole. They are jealous only of one thing—the bravery of their soldiers. You may cut their Kuropatkins and Stoessels and Rodjestvenskeys into thousands of little pieces, but they fiercely insist on the bravery of the Russian Tommy Atkins and his junior officers. They asked me how I accounted for the Japanese beating them, and I said the general opinion was that they were ill-prepared and ill-organised as compared with the Japanese. That gave them a chance to curse the Government, which they all did freely, openly, and with marked emphasis. This I thought surprising, for at least half were Government officials, one being an army officer. Evidently there was no fear among them of Siberia, while it was clear that all sided with the revolution. Yet they said there was no active revolutionary spirit in Central Asia among the civil population, though they were not prepared to say the same with regard to the troops. One of the points that interested them all was the salaries of the Japanese generals. Alexeieff, the Viceroy of the Far East, they said, received 100,000 roubles a-year, and not one of them thought him worth it. Oyama, the all-conquering, they had heard, received only a tenth of that sum, and

did ten times better work. Here every man cleared his throat meditatively—and spat. Evidently it was occasion for thought.

This mystery of the Russian defeat in Manchuria remains no mystery to the traveller in Russian territory. The main causes are, of course, well understood in Europe, but the reason why these causes existed has never been so apparent, though much has come to light recently in regard to Russian character which makes it clearer than it was before the revolutionary outbreak.

When a Frenchman, or a German, or an Englishman does anything, he does it in the light of a wide experience of up-to-date methods. If he goes by a mail train, he expects it to travel hard from start to finish. If he sends a telegram, he expects a reply almost immediately. When he drops a letter into the post, it is with the assurance that the posting is as effectual as personal delivery to the addressee. If he commences a new enterprise, he employs the latest inventions of science, of which his newspapers and magazines have long made him familiar. And in connection with everything public he is accustomed to have no doubt whatever about the general probity of officials.

With the Russian everything is the opposite. He expects very little from a mail train—in Central Asia mails are always many hours late, and utterly unnecessary delays take place at every station. His telegram may be delayed by a hundred causes, while his letter may be lost in the post-office or stopped therein by the police. If he starts a new business he does not employ the latest inventions because he doesn't know about them. When the Government runs anything he has not the slightest doubt that the officials sacrifice results to line their own pockets. I asked one Russian when they were going to complete the railway from Andijan to Osh, another thirty miles. He replied that the money had

been furnished, but that the officials had kept it for themselves, a statement hardly worthy of credence.

That such things should be possible, and that such ideas should be current, is proof that as a nation Russia is simply behind the times. Whether this is due only to lack of education or actually to intellectual inferiority I do not presume to say. But when we consider how the Japanese laboured for ten years to spend their limited resources on the most perfect and up-to-date military machine we can understand that the Russian machine, run on the lines and according to the ideas indicated, naturally proved the less efficient when the two met. The Russian character is to be content with things Russian, and not to bother about what Europe is doing or thinking. That is doubtless due in part to the repressive system of government that has hitherto prevailed, and probably in part to the strain of Oriental blood which runs in Russian veins.

I have laboured to express an original view, and perhaps I have produced no more than a truism. What I want to combat is the common belief that the Russian is constitutionally and markedly inferior to the more virile races of Europe. If Nelson with his three-deckers of a hundred years ago could meet Lord Charles Beresford with his present-day battleships, we all know who would be sent to the bottom. And even the most ardent admirer of the gallant Admiral of the Channel Fleet will be ready to admit that it was not necessarily the best man that won. Nelson would be beaten simply because he was behind the times in regard to naval construction.

That is just the condition in Russia—she is behind the times in military science, and, indeed, in most sciences. But to suppose that she will remain so is highly conjectural. We have all seen the race wherein the leaders exhaust themselves before the finish, and when some

outsider, full of running, drops from the clouds and wins. Germany, France, and ourselves now suffer from numerous social evils, and many people think they detect signs of decay where civilisation is at its highest. Russia has not yet quite reached the same height of civilisation, but when her domestic troubles settle down there will come over her a very great change. There is no country in Europe that possesses such resources as Russia, such room for expansion, such invulnerability to aggressive neighbours. These are valuable assets for a state contemplating reconstruction. Russia may prove to be the outsider of the not very far distant future.

We arrived at Askabad about seven hours late, and after half an hour trying to get my baggage out of the train, and another half-hour waiting for a carriage, I found myself proceeding to another Grand Hotel, having completed the cheapest railway journey on record. It ought to have cost me about £10, including a first-class ticket and the charges for luggage, but all I disbursed was sixteen silver shillings. So if I have poked fun at the Transcaspian railway, the reader will understand that I did it out of pure good-humour.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ASKABAD.

Of the Grand Hotel, and of my adventures in Askabad, I will give as brief an account as possible. Only one man in the town could speak English, and I had the address to find him the very morning after I arrived. His name was Mr Ismail Khan, and he was the Persian Consul. Having been educated in France, and having helped to represent his country in Germany, England, and India, he was of course a linguist and a man of the world. I asked his assistance because at the hotel nobody could speak anything but Russian, and I wanted to arrange about getting to Meshed. Mr Ismail Khan said it was perfectly simple, and that it was necessary only to hire a carriage and proceed. On the road at every halting-place I would find a buffet and sleeping accommodation. He advised me only to take a little bread, as that might be scarce on the way. He finally agreed to send his servant to a driver whom he knew, and who would take me to Meshed in good style—which in this country means with four horses. The distance was 177 miles, and it would take four days to compass. Unfortunately post-horses were not available.

Later in the day Mr Ismail Khan came to see me, and said he had fixed the matter, and his man would start the day after next, and only charge me 70 roubles for the trip. I was very grateful to my friend, and he further

assisted me by walking through the town with me and showing me the best shops, and so forth. By evening, however, I had entirely exhausted the sights of Askabad, and as the hotel waiter had found another driver willing to proceed to Meshed immediately, and for the same money, I decided to start. I wrote Mr Ismail Khan, explained the circumstances, and said I was quite willing to pay his man a trifle of compensation. The hotel man said he would do the distance in equal time, and would also have the four finest horses in Askabad to drive. I then set forth to make a few purchases, not because I doubted Mr Ismail Khan's word in regard to the buffet, but because I don't like to be entirely dependent on other people for food. I bought various small tins, not knowing in the least what was inside them, and then I observed a French label, and hastened to purchase a box of *pâté de fois gras*, thereby having one thing I knew about—which, alas! was to cause me much agony before I arrived at Meshed.

During my rounds of Askabad I paid a visit to the racecourse, which stirred ancient memories. There was racing the next day, and I wavered, but decided not to stay. Instead, I went to inspect the monument to the soldiers who fell at Geok Tepe, and in connection with which a volume in my possession says that the guns standing at each corner were taken from the Afghans at Panjdeh in 1885. That is quite correct, but the guns themselves were cast at Cossipore, in 1842 I think, and bear the well-known motto of the Order of the Garter. Panjdeh is an old story now, and need not be resuscitated except to remind the reader that a body of 1200 Russians completely and effectively thrashed an equal number of Afghans, killing, I have been told, no less than 700, and capturing all their guns.

Such is the Russian experience of Afghan valour and intelligence in war. They don't know anything about

him in the guerilla fighting which has taught us such respect for the hill tribes in the North-west. I wonder how much of Russian confidence in their ability to reach India is based upon their idea of the uselessness of the Afghan as a soldier. Though I have steadily set my face against accepting the idea that the one and only grand aim of Russia's policy in Central Asia is the conquest of India, I am still aware that the Russian War Office contains hundreds of schemes for an invasion of India, among which not the least extravagant is Skobeleff's. These are nearly all based upon the assumption that India is waiting to turn upon us, and that the Afghan is straining at his leash in the hope of being allowed to descend upon India with fire and sword. There seems something contradictory about the two things both working together for Russia's advantage, but Russia commands so large a share of Divine favour, or did a few years back, that anything might happen. We are comforted to think that once the Afghan army gets handsomely beaten at the opening of a war with Russia, it will then revert to its true *rôle*, and render Russian camps and Russian columns places of utter martyrdom. The Russian complained that in Manchuria the tough little Jap was too quick for him in the hills. But in the mountains the Afghan could give the Jap fifty in every hundred yards and climb his head off. Heaven help the Russian army that has to campaign in Afghanistan. Oh, that my grey hairs may be this side the grave when the dogs of war are loosed!

When day dawned at Askabad I anxiously inquired about my carriage, but it had not yet arrived. I spent the time in breakfasting and in trying to impress on the hotel manager that I wanted the bill. When at last I made him understand, he proceeded to write it out with much labour. The addition was arrived at by aid of the abacus, and was, of course, 50 kopecks wrong in his own

favour. What I acknowledge about Russian hotels is that though they charge you extra for candles, bed-sheets, hot water for washing, towels for drying your hands, and other things, they are most moderate in their endeavours really to mulct the traveller. In each of my experiences they tried to defraud me of only 50 kopecks, and in common justice I must allow that the fault may well have lain with the abacus. One might remark that the abacus is a faithful servant, for both times it erred to the advantage of its owners.

Then was announced the phaeton. I looked out of the window, and beheld in a ramshackle machine only three horses, whereas my contract was for four. With the aid of a pencil, paper, and a handful of roubles I demonstrated to the hotel people that if four horses were to cost 70 roubles, three horses were only equal to 52½ roubles! That set the driver off running for the fourth horse, while his wife, his mother, and his wife's mother each stood at the head of one of the three standing in the carriage. Why this solicitude to hold animals that wouldn't wink an eyelid at the crack o' doom I knew not. Perhaps they thought it would impress me, but they didn't know I was not so green about horses as my beard made me look. Anyhow, the fourth animal arrived and was hitched to the side with a piece of rope. We were just about to proceed from thinking of beginning to load up the luggage when a personage appeared, causing a flutter among the women and a look of deadly hate to dawn upon the driver's face.

This was Mr Ismail Khan's driver who was being done out of his job. Even as the circumstances would have given rise to a shindy in London, so did they here. The two drivers, the hotel porter, the manager, the three women, and a few others all joined in, and a prettier squabble I've never seen. At the beginning there was a tendency to throw the blame upon me, but all soon

realised that they might as well address a brick wall. They argued among themselves, and gradually brought all the hotel guests out of their rooms. One of these spoke to me in French, and when the squabblers found I was no longer deaf and dumb they set upon him. It now appeared that the first driver was both able and willing to complete the journey to Meshed in four days, but that the man I was now taking could not do it in less than five because his horses were inferior. That threw me into a rage, and I told the man waiting that he had deceived me about the number of horses and the time to be spent on the road. I then ordered him hence, to the joy of the other, who now thought he was sure of the job. But no sooner had the man with the women lost the opportunity than his family set upon him, and out of the *mêlée* came an offer to take me to Meshed for 50 roubles. Unfortunately I closed with this, else, said my French-speaking friend, I might have let them bring it down to 20 roubles.

But the morning was now advancing, and it was necessary to make a start. My driver kissed all his mothers, cajoled me out of 10 roubles for them to live on in his absence, and then we began to move. I had never thought four horses could possibly have been so unanimous about speed. Some trotted, some ambled, and the others walked, but the pace never exceeded 4½ miles an hour. I had seen pictures of Russian four-horsed carriages at the gallop, and had felt that this must be the most exhilarating and exciting kind of movement in the world. But the reality was slower than an Exeter Hall meeting for men alone. Oh, the melancholy of it. In an hour we were clear of Askabad, and slowly crawling towards a range of hills. My driver gave up using his whip, for the horses did not mind it, and took to groaning, or as we would call it in Scotland, girning at them. I could not fall asleep for the bumping, and if I did

succeed I must be thrown out. I now came to the conclusion, which my journey between Osh and Andijan had already suggested, that driving in Central Asia was far more fatiguing than riding, and far more nerve-destroying than motoring.

Having crept along for many hours, we stopped at a Russian dak bungalow. A man and woman with many babies lived here, and I was furnished with a samovar, from which I brewed myself a cup of tea. There were notices on the walls stating the prices of various kinds of refreshments, none of which were available unless one waited half a day. The writing was of course Russian and entirely indecipherable, and in looking over the complaint book I thought how much more Christian it would be if angry travellers on British soil were compelled to express their denunciations in the Russian character.

We now commenced climbing in reality. High hillsides were compassed by means of endless zigzags that slowly but surely sidled upwards. Here I viewed a covey of partridges on the road ahead, and soon got the gun out. But the Russian bird runs like the wind, and I thought him more suspicious than any other partridge I had ever met. This may be a compliment to Russian skill in sport, but it may also be construed into a reflection upon Russian character, which has ever been famed for cunning. But these birds did not realise the depth of duplicity which characterises British methods. I gave them a taste of it. Perceiving that to get out of the carriage and run after them with a gun was the surest way never to get within range, I left it, scrambled up the side of the hill until I struck the road above a zigzag, and at a corner lay in wait. Presently the carriage entered upon my zigzag, and commenced slowly to crawl up. All the birds on the road commenced running away from the carriage—and towards me. It was a soul-

satisfying moment when they reached my corner, and ere the echoes of the double shot had ceased thundering among the hills I was collecting the little victims of a perfidious policy.

Before finally plunging into the mountains the road afforded a commanding view of the country to the north. About thirty miles away lay the tree-embowered town of Askabad, no more than a dark spot on the yellow plain. Fifty miles to the north-west, but quite indistinguishable in the haze, was the scene of the tragedy at Geok Tepe, while the immense semicircle facing north-east marked the horizon lying a hundred miles away on the interminable sand of the Karakum Desert. It was a practical illustration of the idea I have tried to convey to the reader. Here was a town containing some 30,000 inhabitants and a garrison of nigh 10,000 soldiers, the capital of a province nearly ten times the size of Scotland, and one of the most important points on the Russian frontier. Yet compared with the surrounding expanse it was no more than a dot; not knowing it was there, one might have passed it over and thought there stretched afar nothing but the vast solitude of the changeless desert. Such is the Central Asia for which Russia has poured out blood and treasure, illimitable deserts with here and there patches of laboriously redeemed cultivation that no amount of capital and no amount of emigration can materially expand. There are no rolling prairies that need only the scratch of the plough and the whistle of the railway-engine to be transformed into wealth-producing country, no long-conserved resources of nature awaiting the advent of man. Central Asia is the bed of an ancient salt ocean, and its geological past will continue to militate against its progress from a human point of view until in the dim future natural changes cause a revision in the conditions. Something may be

done to employ more effectively the limited supply of water that is available. But much energy will be needed to procure a small return, and one cannot but reflect that Russian capital and Russian hands would be much better employed in other parts of the empire where nature has been more kind.

It is impossible that this view can have escaped those minds that have worked for the good of Russia, and whose economic perceptions have not been clouded by vain dreams of aggrandisement. This chimera of the conquest of India has been largely responsible for the advance into Central Asia, and the expenditure of huge sums that may never return to Russia. The necessity continually to advance boundaries, so clearly explained in Prince Gortschakoff's famous circular, might have been obviated were it not for that powerful and egotistical section of the Russian autocracy which concerns itself with military matters. Every little occurrence on the southern frontiers was magnified into an occasion that made extension imperative. The ostensible object was the establishment of the *pax Slavonica*, but the real object was—India. An army in Central Asia was an excellent political weapon with which to threaten timorous British Cabinets, but too high a price may be paid for an article which is good to show but ineffectual to use. The adventure into Turkestan has been a heavy drain on Russian resources, and there can be few thinking Russians who do not deplore it. Certainly to-day Russia has facilities for throwing a huge army on the Afghan frontier. But is she any nearer the conquest of India? Has not that policy of aggression in Central Asia, and in the Far East, contributed to the economic condition of the country to-day, and tied the hands of those who would still go to war if money were procurable? Is not the revolution in great part a consequence of the policy which has wasted the country's money in

foreign enterprise when that money was urgently required at home? Moreover, the realisation of the Russian facilities for attack has forced reorganisation on India, and to-day our powers of defence are twice what they were before the railway system of Central Asia had attained present dimensions. When order is evolved out of the state of chaos that now exists in Russia, and constitutional government is established, or such a form of government as will effectually clip the wings of autocracy, it is quite certain that there will be an all-round repudiation of the policy of aggression. I would be slow to deny that in the Far East economic necessities may compel a warlike policy. But in Central Asia economy and a forward policy are utterly incompatible: the latter can only be pursued by completely ignoring the former.

Having compassed some forty miles throughout the day, we arrived at the Russian frontier post of Bajgirha at dark. I then gathered from my driver that we had to run the gauntlet of the Frontier Guards and the Customs in the morning. That struck a sudden chill to my heart, for to tell the truth, I was not prepared for such an encounter. When leaving Askabad I requested the hotel people to return my passport, but it being still in the hands of the police I departed without it, thinking that no authority would be necessary to cross the border in the wrong direction. That shows how little I comprehended the intricacies of the Russian bureaucratic system. In the morning I handed over my ordinary passport, unaccompanied by the special certificate which had hitherto authorised my presence in Turkestan, and waited for the consequences with some trepidation.

Presently a Frontier Guard came up and intimated that I must go with him. All were smiling and pleasant when I handed in the passport, but now a gloom had settled on the faces of the bystanders, and my driver had

begun to mutter. I was ushered into a room full of large uniformed persons who looked suspiciously at me. I explained the reason of being without the special certificate, and the bad French in which I expressed myself must have added to its inadequacy. The levity of my departure from Askabad without my papers struck horror to the hearts of those representatives of constitutional order. If I had shot a governor or broken a bank they could have understood it, but that I should have ventured to the frontier without sufficient authority in writing proved me either a madman or a highly dangerous person. A lengthy cross-examination ensued, and my family and public history from the age of five were duly recorded. When they heard that I was travelling under protection of the Foreign Office at St Petersburg there was some excitement, and a very confidential book was produced from an iron safe.

And there it all was—name, redacteur of gazette, Indian passport, proceeding to Persia, interested in British trade, apparently innocuous, doubtless Russophobe, get him out of the country quick, and so forth. Whatever my character, it was quite clear that the Russian Government meant me to go to Persia without undue delay. My interlocutors became very polite, offered me tea and cigarettes, bade me God-speed, and in five minutes I was once more sitting behind the four Rosinantes.

PERSIA.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PERSIAN FRONTIER.

After crossing the Russian frontier at Bajgirha we drove about two miles and came to another village of the same name. This was the Persian frontier post, and here my driver prepared for eventualities, running the carriage into a compound and unhitching the horses. He had been there before, and knew the Persians would take their time. A French-speaking individual came along with two ruffians, and opened my kit. They seized my guns with a snort of satisfaction, gathered up my camera, binoculars, aneroid, ammunition, and everything that looked important. A small leather case containing toilet appurtenances they insisted on opening, despite my explanation of the contents. One unwashed creature went the length of penetrating into the soap-box, and I thought of presenting him with the contents, only it would have been irony wasted. We now adjourned to an office, and I was told that the Customs officer would soon appear. Meantime I was questioned about the value of my property, and all was passed except the guns and cartridges.

When his High Mightiness appeared an hour later, he sat down in his chair with an air of utter lassitude. He listened to the explanations of his inferiors, and then allowed a dreamy glance to rest upon me. I wondered whether it was drink, or opium, or merely mental decay that afflicted him. He leant back in his chair, sighed heavily, and spoke a few words in a far-off voice. The clerk translated these into French, and it meant that I must pay heavy duty on the gun, and that the rifle would not be allowed to pass at all until the Legation at Teheran had arranged the matter with the Persian Government. Small-bore rifles are not popular with the authorities in Persia.

I then made complaint in a loud voice. Never had my baggage been subjected to such search, even in Russia. Never had my soap-box been opened. The Persian Consul-General at Bombay had been extremely polite, as also the Consul at Askabad. And now at this petty frontier post I was subjected to indignity and seriously delayed. When I reached Teheran I would get our Minister to represent the matter to the Government. This diatribe had considerable effect, but I afterwards understood that a toman—four shillings—would have been far more efficacious. I now arranged that the guns and ammunition would be taken over by the Customs and immediately despatched to the Chief Customs Officer at Meshed, where I would have the assistance of our Consul-General in getting them back. While waiting for the receipt for my property the lackadaisical gentleman carefully examined the rifle, and finally signified his desire to purchase it.

It was a Mauser carbine that I had taken from the wily Boer in 1900. It probably had cost Paul Kruger about a fiver, but I had spent nothing on it except a sovereign for a leather case. It seemed a pity to part with such a relic, but as I had another of the same kind at home,

and as a rifle promised to be a burdensome thing in Persia and in re-entering Russia on my way through Europe, I entertained the proposal, and eventually dealt at sixty roubles. The transaction was completed with suspicious suddenness, and I wondered what could prompt the Oriental to pay my own price without bargaining, and to hand over the money without flinching. My way was now made easy, and we parted with a great display of good feeling. I had pretty good value for a thing that had cost me nothing, and which must have been a nuisance on my travels. The Customs officer—I afterwards discovered—had got, for a fraction of the duty, a weapon that was worth double the amount, and one which he could not have imported into the country without special permission from his Government. I wonder which is the harder—for a Scot to admit financial defeat; or for an Oriental to be officially incorrupt!

The mountain barrier which divides Russian and Persian territory in this part of the world is an extension of the great Elburz range that stretches along the whole northern boundary of Persia, and physically delimitates its borders. In the extreme west the Elburz range merges into the Caucasus, the whole system forming a natural frontier, and one which actually bounded the kingdom of Persia until Russia conquered both sides of the Caucasus and advanced her borders southward on that broad band of country which divides the Caspian and Black Seas. One is ever encountering similar evidence of the importance of physical features in determining the limits of states, mountains more than any other natural phenomena except seas appearing to indicate the ethnographic, economic, and strategic limits within which it is possible to consolidate political power. This mountain system which bounds Persia in the north admirably illustrates the effectiveness of natural frontiers, and gives rise to inter-

esting reflections in regard to that section which has been violated by the Russian advance over the Caucasus. We find that the inhabitants of those provinces of the Caucasus that once owed allegiance to Teheran are politically restless, extremely sympathetic towards the recent awakening in Persia, and are generally causing uneasiness to their Russian conquerors. In other words, Russia, having crossed the natural frontier which separated her territory from that of Persia, finds herself half-way into a foreign land, and involved in complications which may ultimately compel her either to retreat, or to advance to some more tangible dividing-line than the small river which now separates the two countries.

Immediately south of Askabad, the extension of the Elburz range is split up into several well-defined ridges, the peaks in which frequently exceed 10,000 feet in height, and which can seldom be crossed by passes of lower elevation than 7000 feet. Those seem trifling heights after the Central Asian monsters about which I have so often wearied the reader. But they are important in connection with the road by which they are traversed, and still more so because of the degree of difficulty which they present to possible railway construction in the future. From Askabad, which stands no more than 700 feet above sea-level, this road slowly rises over a sloping plain about eight miles broad, and then enters the hilly region aforesaid. The total ascent is something like 7000 feet, a height that is attained at least three times during transit of the mountains. Dividing valleys are usually about 4000 feet above sea-level, and there are, of course, numerous minor ascents to be surmounted. Between Askabad and Kuchan, the first town reached on the Persian plain, the distance is about eighty miles, of which sixty-five present engineering problems that would make railway construction extremely expensive. On the Russian side of the frontier the road is broad, carefully made, and well maintained on the

whole. On the Persian side there is twice as much mountain to be crossed, and there has been twice as much difficulty in constructing the road. The Persian section compares very badly with the Russian, for though it has been well planned the surface is in a very bad condition, and many of the bridges have been carried away, and are replaced by constructions that must suffer the same fate in the next rainy season. What is important to realise is, that the existing road, from a railway point of view, can have no possible value, as the turns and gradients make it quite impracticable for even the lightest and smallest gauge of line.

When projected, this road was of extreme strategic importance. After the Russian subjugation of the Turkomans at Geok Tepe the Transcaspian railway was advanced to Askabad, and it was realised that the rich Persian province of Khorasan, less than a hundred miles across the mountains, was capable of providing large supplies—it had, indeed, materially contributed to the victualling of the force operating at Geok Tepe—and was, moreover, directly in what was then regarded as the direct line of advance towards Herat and India. Diplomatic pressure at Teheran resulted in Persian co-operation in the construction of a road that was to unite economically the natural resources of Khorasan with the Russian railhead at Askabad. Nobody, of course, was blind to the strategic significance of the road, and in England and Persia consequent developments were watched with great anxiety. Possibly we would have gone to war with Russia if she had attempted occupation of Khorasan, and it would be interesting to know in what degree our attitude at that time in regard to the Khorasan question was responsible for the diversion of Russian strategic activity to other spheres. It has been said that the Russians designed the road with the idea of making practicable the laying down of a light military line when occasion arose; but in view of the objections mentioned,

that can hardly have been the case. Anyhow, it is now realised that if a branch of the Transcaspian line is to be built to Meshed and Seistan, the route adopted will be not from Askabad, but from Kaakha or Dushak. However, now that the extension of the railway system of Central Asia has completely revolutionised the strategic situation, all the importance of the Askabad-Meshed road has disappeared, and, indeed, Khorasan itself is now only on the flank of our friend the enemy.

In the previous chapter I dwelt on the obstacles to travel presented both by Russian and Persian frontier posts. On referring to Lord Curzon's book on Persia, I find that in 1892 he traversed the same road without encountering anybody anxious to detain his person or examine his baggage. In those days, however, the Persian road had not been constructed, nor had the Belgians assumed control of the Customs. Now there is considerable trade over the route, and both Russia and Persia impose duties which are well worth collecting. I found, however, that Mr Ismail Khan's belief in the existence of buffets on the road to Meshed was an optimism of the first magnitude. Fortunately for me, I had laid in supplies at Askabad, and was independent. Here I must mention that of the edibles I brought with me one small remnant of my Indian stores was the only thing that saved me from utter gastronomical despair. This was a tin of butter bought at Simla in April, and made by the Imperial Dairy Company of Bombay. Long may that Company flourish and continue to supply the traveller with equally delicious butter. Most of the things bought at Askabad turned out to be anathema to my British palate, while the *pâté* regularly clawed my vitals.

But at last we were clear of hills, and entered upon the broad valley in which Kuchan is the principal town, as well as being capital of the province of the same name. The inhabitants of Kuchan are not Persians but Kurds, and it is interesting to know how people who belong to

the far-distant highlands of north-west Persia and to Asia Minor have come to dwell on foreign soil.

Some hundreds of years ago the Kuchan Valley, one of the most fertile spots in Persia, was overrun by Tartar robbers, just as in more recent times it had suffered from the Tekke Turkomans. In consequence, life at Kuchan had become impossible, and the then king, Shah Abbas, found that not only did he draw no revenue from the district, but that he was always spending money on its protection. With a broad-mindedness worthy of emulation in more modern days he decided to transplant a turbulent tribe of people from their own happy hunting-grounds to where their martial qualities would be required for their own defence. He ordered 40,000 families of Kurds to move from one extremity of his kingdom to another, a distance of over 1000 miles. And the astonishing thing is that something like 100,000 persons are believed actually to have complied, doubtless under persuasion. At any rate, they were dumped down in and around the plain of Kuchan, where their descendants remain to this day. The newcomers were now kept busy cultivating with one hand and fighting with the other. Shah Abbas gave them various privileges, for which they guaranteed the safety of the northern frontier and furnished cavalry to the army. In time the community grew strong and wealthy, and their chief was raised from Khan to the dignity of Ilkhani, or Lord of the Clans. But so powerful did the Ilkhanis become that they frequently rebelled, and it is recorded of Nadir Shah that he married a daughter of the hereditary family in order to regain its allegiance. And it was, in fact, after his return from the famous Indian expedition, and when he was actually besieging Kuchan in the endeavour to quell a subsequent rebellion, that Nadir Shah was murdered. But in present times the Kurds of Kuchan have dwindled in political power, and now they are entirely submissive to rule from Teheran. In appearance

and dress they are easily distinguished from the Persians, their rough clothes and headgear marking them no less than their strong features and energetic demeanour.

The Kuchan plain is typical of certain phases of Persian scenery and physical environment. North of the mountainous region first described, the level of the Central Asian plain is very low, varying from 84 feet below sea-level on the surface of the Caspian to 800 feet above at Bokhara, and 1500 feet above at Tashkent. On the southern side of the mountain barrier there is a totally different condition, for the whole of the interior of Persia, with unimportant exceptions, is one vast table-land ranging from 3000 to 6000 feet above sea-level. This immense upland is all desert but for strips of cultivation that have been made possible by the presence of water and the absence of saline deposit. The whole of the interior of Persia, roughly 600 miles long and 300 wide, is supposed to be solid desert, of which the greater part is incrusted with saline efflorescence, or covered with salt marsh. Besides the immense central desert, there are here and there great patches of similar country lying among the more fertile regions. The relative area of desert to cultivation is enormous, and as a consideration of the proportion is essential to an understanding of the economic condition of Persia, I shall in a future chapter endeavour to form an estimate of the ratio. Another feature of the country is the mountain-ranges by which it is traversed. I have read that in Persia it is never possible to lose sight of mountains, and certainly in my own travels, which ultimately extended over 1000 miles, I invariably found mountains on either side within comparatively short distances.

Kuchan, then, lies on a plain flanked on either hand by ranges of hills that rise from a general level of 4000 feet to peaks measuring 8000 to 10,000 feet above sea-level. The surrounding soil is free from salt, and is watered

from both sides by a number of rivulets which unite near Kuchan and form the source of the Atrek river, which eventually flows into the Caspian Sea, 400 miles away. The town has a population of about 10,000, who subsist on the agricultural products of the surrounding district. It was once walled and distinguished by important buildings, of which few traces now remain. Fruit of many kinds grows freely, and Curzon says that under irrigation the land gives an hundredfold return of grain. The neighbourhood of the Russian railway has stimulated the growth of cotton, of which there is a considerable export to Russia.

A few miles south-east of Kuchan, in a plain that appears dead-level, there is a watershed dividing the sources of the Atrek from those of the Keshef Rud, a stream that flows south-east past Meshed and falls into the famous Heri Rud at Pul-i-Khatun, a point well-known to those who followed the progress of the Afghan Boundary Commission in the 'eighties. The fertility which distinguishes Kuchan is not continued, and much of the road lies over irredeemable desert. I might here mention that the section of the Askabad-Meshed road lying beyond Kuchan is perfectly level, and that in consequence engineering has not been thought necessary. As a result the track is fearfully rough, being covered with stones at some points and intersected by deep quagmires at others. At certain periods of the year it is almost impracticable to wheeled transport, owing to the mud. It has been said that railway construction would be perfectly simple between Kuchan and Meshed, and that laying the rails on the bare plain would be sufficient. Probably a low embankment, with numerous culverts to give passage to the sudden floods which storms in the adjacent mountains frequently generate, would amply meet the necessities of the case.

Shortly after leaving Kuchan I was overjoyed to meet

a Persian sowar courteously sent to meet me by our Consul-General at Meshed. He brought a bundle of correspondence that had been waiting for me for months, and an invitation from Major Kennion to stop with him while I was at Meshed. Thus cheered by the way, and fortified by a batch of newspapers, I allowed my phaeton to pursue its tortoise-like course, uplifted by the expectation of soon seeing familiar faces and enjoying the comforts of civilisation. Major Kennion was well known to me by name, and doubtless to many readers, as the noted Kashmir shikari, once Joint-Commissioner at Leh, and later our Political Agent at Chitral.

We spent the fourth night of the journey at Chinaran, where I vainly endeavoured to send a telegram to Meshed warning them of my approach. The clerk in charge was out shooting duck, but his servant assured me that he spoke French and Hindustani, and that there would be no difficulty about sending the wire. When the gallant officer—he was ranked major—returned from sport with one fat mallard, I was disappointed to find that he knew none beside his own language, and that as it was a newly opened office, he could not send a telegram at all. I then went back to scrape my Imperial butter-tin to the uttermost corners, and to regret the purchase of the *pâté* which, long consumed, was now having its revenge.

The last day's drive was most unpleasant, being hot and bright, while a high wind drove the dust in clouds that settled on everything one possessed. An ancient toothache woke up in my jaw, and during a halt under a shady tree a wasp selected me for the purpose of stinging. A violent attack of liver—my very first—joined itself with a slight sunstroke to make my existence a misery. A touch of lumbago did not add distinction to my gait when I arrived at the Consulate at Meshed, and was received with Indian hospitality despite my sorry and travel-stained appearance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KHORASAN.

TWENTY years ago, or even ten, there was no more important name than Khorasan in the foreign politics that concerned the British Empire. In 1881 Skobeleff made the last military step for Russia in Central Asia, followed it up by the peaceful occupation of Merv in 1884, and initiated schemes which resulted in the delimitation of an advanced boundary between Russian and Afghan territory. Simultaneously the Transcaspian railway was being slowly pushed forward, and when in 1885 it reached Askabad, public interest was focussed on Khorasan. This province of Persia, in the stage of development then reached by Russian strategy, was of supreme importance to any schemes that might be afoot. Askabad was, practically, nearer India than any other point yet reached by Russia, and from it a comparatively easy route ran into the rich province of Khorasan, from thence to the fertile plain of Herat, wherefrom was comparatively plain sailing to Kandahar and the Indian frontier. When we remember the successive movements of Russia in Turkestan, there is no wonder that the advent of the railway at Askabad was regarded as a culminating step, and one that, if followed up, must force the Indian Government to make a counter movement. So far we had established a consular agent at Meshed to watch the situation, while we had replied to the extension of the

railway by the fortification of Quetta. If Russia violated the Persian border by entering Khorasan, would we not have been bound to mobilise and to advance to Kandahar? To do that meant war against Russia, for on no other consideration could we enter Afghanistan. And would the Afghans regard the occupation of Khorasan as justification for operations in their country? We were pledged to maintain its integrity, but so suspicious a people as the Afghans were as likely to believe that we had come to stop as that we were there to protect them from an attack which had not yet been made. Those must have been anxious times for Indian Councillors and Cabinet Ministers.

Khorasan must indeed have tempted Russia sorely. Much money had been spent on the advance from the Caspian, and all of it in country that for practical purposes did not grow a blade of grass. The strip of cultivation north of the Persian mountains barely sufficed to keep the inhabitants in food, and every loaf of bread for the garrison, almost every pound of grain for the horses, and almost every drop of water for the railway, had to come by train from Krasnovodsk on the Caspian. At three-quarters of the stations on the line water had to be transported for the employees and military guards. To halt in such a region, when a land of plenty lay close at hand, must have been galling indeed to those fiery spirits who had done so much to commit their country to the pursuit of the forward policy.

In contrast to this picture of the unprofitableness of the latest Russian conquest, Khorasan was a Garden of Eden. It grew large surplus supplies of grain, supported great numbers of sheep and cattle, provided illimitable fruit, was well watered, and afforded the accommodation of considerable towns with substantial houses instead of the tent-like yourts that were the only habitations of the Turkoman country. In those days Skobeleff schemed to

invade India with a mere handful of men, counting for success upon Afghan co-operation and the rising of the natives. For his European army of some 20,000 men the fertile districts of Khorasan, of which Meshed was the centre, would furnish sufficient supplies. Meshed was an emporium of trade that employed large numbers of camels, horses, and donkeys for the carrying of merchandise. These would all be available for transport. And Skobeleff's communications, in the event of the major declaration, would be secure; for the Turkomans were cowed, and a single battalion could deal with all the soldiers in Persia if the Shah were foolish enough to attempt interference, or if he missed the significance of a military review in the Caucasus.

What were the precise reasons for Russian abstention at this time is known probably only to a few people in London and St Petersburg. But it cannot be far wrong of the mark if we assume that when it really came to the point of breaking the peace the better-balanced advisers of the Tsar realised the intrinsic weakness of all existing schemes, based as they were on Afghan support and rebellion in India. Nor could they ignore the fact that a campaign against modern armed and trained troops on the Indian frontier, with their bases handy, was a very different matter from sending a column against the ill-armed rabble that constituted the defence of a Khanate. Desert marching, at which no troops in the world are better than the Russians, was a preliminary of either operation, but the task at the end of one march was quite different from the task at the end of the other. Against the Khanate the campaign was won whenever the troops arrived within the theatre of war — battles thereafter being certainties. But against India the Russian army must waste its strength in the desert and then arrive to find that all the serious work was in front. Skobeleff's plan was visionary, as probably were most of the others,

and every sensible man in Russia saw it; hence the abstention from Khorasan—and perhaps the evolution of the bigger and more dangerous strategic scheme that confronts us to-day. That scheme entails a line of advance which does not include Khorasan. The extension of the Transcaspian railway, with its branch at Kushk and the projected branch to Termez, throws the Russian front directly upon the Afghan border, making Herat and Kandahar respectively equi-distant from the Russian and Indian outposts, while Kabul on the other flank lies exactly midway between the opposing lines. A general advance from the line Kushk-Termez leaves Meshed well in rear, as well as those parts of Khorasan that have productive value.

The strategic focus having departed from Khorasan, its fate has ceased to be of primary importance either to ourselves or to Russia. Nevertheless, it occupies an important position on the Russian flank, and it is obvious that Meshed would be a valuable source of supply to a Russian army at Herat, in that it would relieve the Kushk line of part of the heavy burden imposed upon it by military operations. And the Russians being so great on retreat, they would doubtless find the Meshed-Askabad road a useful auxiliary when their preconceived notions of the Indian army had been corrected somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Helmund. Khorasan, therefore, always must be a factor in the situation, not essential but subsidiary, and a glance at its resources has necessarily to be included in any reconnaissance of the Russian position in Central Asia.

In a country where statistics are practically non-existent it is difficult to form a reliable estimate of economic conditions. But for the purpose of inquiring into the resources of Khorasan that have military value there are figures available which give us exactly what we

want. The Belgian Director-General of Customs has published a statement showing the exports to Russia for the year 1905-6. From this we glean that

13,000 cattle . . .	valued at	£25,000
100,000 sheep . . .	"	17,000
Dried fruits . . .	"	59,000
Untanned skins and furs .	"	40,000

passed over the border. Then we find that the total trade of Khorasan with Russia amounted to over £1,000,000 in value. The great bulk of the goods represented by that figure were exported from and imported to that strip of country lying between Kuchan and Turbat-i-Haideri, all of it on the direct line between Askabad and Herat. To maintain this trade there are large numbers of camels, horses, mules, and donkeys, a goodly proportion of which would doubtless become available for a marching army. Then near Meshed there is a coal mine, as well as unlimited quantities of wood for fuel—while the fruit-trees lasted—a commodity strikingly scarce in the mountains between Askabad and Kuchan, and none too plentiful anywhere in the neighbourhood of Herat. Besides these items there is available for export about 10,000 tons of wheat in ordinary years, and 20,000 tons in good years. None of this leaves Persia, but is exported to other provinces, and distributed on the pilgrim route between Meshed and Teheran. I have never seen an estimate of the number of pilgrims that annually visit Meshed, but I understand that an average of 8000 are always to be found within its walls. In the event of war the pilgrim traffic would diminish, and a great proportion of the supplies usually consumed by the pilgrim population would become available for the Russian army.

With the exception of the mountains between Askabad and Kuchan, the route to Herat *viâ* Meshed offers no serious physical obstacles to the movement of troops.

The road described in the last chapter is perfectly passable to field artillery and wheeled transport, though it would be the better of repair on the Persian side. From Kuchan to Meshed at certain seasons of the year the going would be extremely heavy, but not so bad that a company of sappers could not effectually remedy it. From Meshed to Herat I understand the road is passable throughout to wheeled traffic. In war doubtless the first Russian step would be the occupation of Herat. Herat secured agents would be despatched to Meshed to establish a supply depot and arrange for the institution of a regular line of communication to Herat. That line might then be used either for the transport of supplies alone, or would become available for the movement of troops from Askabad or Kaakha to Meshed and thence to join the main body at Herat, thus easing the strain on the Kushk railway. Another use there possibly might be for Meshed, though the small size of the British army that would be available would render it unlikely. If the Russians feared a flank attack through Seistan and Birjand, they might occupy the latter in order to anticipate us, in which case the flanking column would necessarily be based on Meshed. Or it might be that they would endeavour to threaten our flank by a movement based on Meshed and directed towards Seistan through Birjand. In the event of war, however, it is hardly to be doubted that wide movements in desert regions would be eschewed by both sides, and the issue confined within the narrowest possible limits. In these remarks the question of Persian neutrality has not been considered, for Persia could not maintain it for a moment if the Russians desired to break it, as they most certainly would in the event of war.

It will thus be seen that though Khorasan is no longer a strategic objective, it is still worthy of attention on account of the material assistance it would afford to

Russian operations in Afghanistan. From a British point of view it also has a melancholy interest, for it illustrates more remarkably than any other region I have travelled the extent to which British has been supplanted by Russian trade, owing to the proximity of the Transcaspian railway.

In 1890, our then Consul-General at Meshed issued a commercial report in which he gave the following figures relating to the years 1889-90:—

Indian imports into Khorasan *viâ* Bunder Abbas	£60,870
British " " Trebizond .	23,400
	£84,270
Add Chinese tea shipped from Bombay by the Gulf and mostly in transit through Khorasan for Central Asia	123,714
Total .	£207,984

Against this total, Russian imports amounted altogether to £110,400.

Confronting these figures with those for 1905-6, we find—

Imports into Khorasan *viâ* Seistan . . .	£11,744
" " Bunder Abbas .	24,739
" " Bushire . .	7,483
" " Baghdad and Teheran	6,615
" " Trebizond . .	22,995
Total .	£73,576

Of this sum a large proportion is represented by Continental goods, and probably only about £50,000 worth were of Indian or British origin. Against this we find that Russian imports for the same period were valued at £458,166. In other words, British and Russian trade were about equal in 1890, whereas in 1906 the Russian trade was nine times as great as the British.

Exports tell a similar tale.

In 1890—				
Russia	took	63	per cent of	the total.
India	"	25	"	"
Afghanistan	"	12	"	"
In 1905-6—				
Russia	took	85	per cent of	the total.
Afghanistan	"	12	"	"
India	"	3	"	"

This makes lugubrious reading. But things are not quite so bad in other parts of Persia; and when I come to review our commercial relations with the country as a whole, I hope to demonstrate that, although the volume of business lies with Russia, our share is more profitable and more likely to be maintained.

I propose to spare the reader an ethnographic and historical sketch of Khorasan, partly because those who are interested in such matters will have already perused Lord Curzon's interesting and learned chapter in his work on Persia, and partly because I have become shy of venturing on thin ice. As already remarked, the various peoples and tribes of Central Asia are so divided and subdivided that it is not possible to follow the various branches without having first made a special study of the subject. And as regards history one is inclined to become a sceptic. Khorasan certainly appears to have occupied a larger share in the doings of past times than its population or appearance of the present would indicate. Khiva and Merv in the north, Balkh in the east, and Kandahar in the south, once acknowledged the dominion of Khorasan, and contributed to the wealth and power of its ruler. I read that when Genghiz Khan and his hordes visited Central Asia, they sent a flying column to Khorasan, and killed 70,000 people in the province. Herat then being included in Khorasan, we

are told that the Mongols besieged the town and captured it, putting 1,600,000 people to the sword. My authority for the above statement is the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' and I might remark that my belief in the story is in inverse ratio to the cubic magnitude of that great work.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MESHED.

MESHED is the capital of the province of Khorasan, and as such occupies a position of some importance. It is no longer on the direct Russian road to India, but, as shown in the last chapter, is the centre of a region that would have considerable strategic value to Russia if she went to war with Afghanistan, which, of course, would be the same as going to war with ourselves. Its location is very clearly indicated by the drawing of a straight line from Krasnovodsk, on the Caspian Sea, whence the Russian railway begins, to Quetta. On that line occur Askabad, Meshed, Herat, and Kandahar, Meshed being distant some 180 miles from Askabad and 230 from Herat. But having already dealt with the strategic aspect, I now turn to another side of this famous city.

At the death of Mahomet his mantle fell with some ambiguity, and gave rise to a schism in the Mahomedan Church. The Khalifate descended through Omar, and is now vested in the Sultan of Turkey, a statement I make subject to the conclusions advanced in the correspondence which has recently taken place on that subject. Other followers of Mahomet declared that his spirit descended on his son-in-law Ali, who founded the line of holy Imams or Prophets. We have thus the two great divisions of the Mussulman faith, the Sunnis who follow the Khalifate, and the Shiahs who give their allegiance

to the Imams. Relations between the two sides have always been strained, bloodshed and murder being a frequent outcome of their feuds. It may seem curious that people who after all believe in the same God, read the same Koran, and who in common regard Mahomet as the Prophet of the Divine will, should split so grievously on a minor issue. But we have a parallel in our own Roman Catholics and Protestants, and, in quite recent and enlightened times, the division in one of the churches in Scotland. For fury and deep-seated hatred it would be hard to say whether Moslem or Christian is the worse. But some study of Inquisitorial or Covenanting days will suggest that where religious convictions are concerned the devil finds the one just as ready to do his work as the other.

In the ninth century it happened that the Khalif of the day resided at Merv, while the rival Imam dwelt at Tus, a town close to Meshed. The story goes that Khalif Mamun, son of the famous Harun-el-Rashid of the Arabian Nights, caused Imam Reza to be poisoned. The holy man was buried where now exists the famous Mosque, which ever since has been a place of pilgrimage for all good Shiahs. The Persians being all of the Shiah persuasion have combined for the four last centuries to glorify and sanctify Meshed, the Place of Martyrdom, and to uphold its reputation against the holy places of the Sunnis. Hence we have the huge numbers of pilgrims who annually visit Meshed, contributing to the wealth of the tomb of Reza, and spreading abroad the fame of the city in which it is situated.

In this far-off corner of Persia Meshed is out of the way for travellers, and the number of Europeans that have visited it are strictly limited. Curzon mentions the earliest as having been the Spanish Ambassador, Don Ruy Gonzalez di Clavijo, who in 1404 passed through it on his way to the Court of Tamerlane at Samarcand.

In modern times a namesake of my own visited it in 1822, and thereafter we get such distinguished names as Burnes, Vambery, Bellew, MacGregor, O'Donovan, until the construction of the Russian railway made the journey comparatively easy, and no longer allows the visitor to Meshed to claim travelling honours.

Meshed has perhaps some 80,000 inhabitants, and no buildings worthy of particular attention except the famous Mosque. This is surrounded by a wall of irregular shape, measuring six or seven miles round, and enclosing an area of four or five square miles. The wall is mud or sun-dried bricks, and is broken down at many points, its defensive value in the present condition being nil. Inside there are fields and large compounds, so that the interior is by no means filled with dwellings. The general appearance is melancholy in the extreme, for there is no variation from the colourless khaki that hardly distinguishes the city itself from the sandy plain that surrounds it. In late autumn the trees have all shed their leaves, and the gaunt branches and bare trunks seem to add to the desolation of the view from the walls. Looking from the north the huge dome and thick towers of the Mosque loom darkly above the vista of roof-tops, but from the south, on a sunny day, the gold work on dome and minaret flashes back the light, and heartens the weary pilgrim when he is yet far distant from the goal of his hopes.

Inside the city one must traverse various squalid lanes before reaching the bazaar. That part which is covered in by groined ceilings of brickwork is dark and mysterious, crowded with people, and lined with shops overflowing with merchandise. Every now and again strings of camels are encountered, the huge boxes or bales which they carry entirely blocking the narrow way, and forcing the passer-by to press to the side to escape damage. Sometimes two lots of camels meet, and then there is

much dislocation of traffic, and a flow of language that would shame a town council. Besides the camels laden horses and donkeys are continually on the move, while horsemen and women riding well-behaved mules are continually ambling along. Then the fascinated European comes to an iron chain that hangs across the bazaar, and here he must stop or venture where the fires of fanaticism are easily awakened.

Beyond the chain is holy ground, where no Giaour may tread. A hundred yards farther is the Holy of Holies, to approach which in these days is said to be death for a European. But there have been times when access to the Mosque, and even the Tomb itself, has been obtained by travellers. My aforesaid namesake describes, in his 'Journey into Khorasan,' how he entered in the year 1822, to be followed by Vambery in 1863, both in the character of Mussulmans. Fraser, however, recounts in his 'Winter's Journey' that in 1834, after the occupation of the city by the army of Abbas Mirza, there was no objection raised to entry by Europeans. Altogether, with the accounts of these Europeans who have penetrated in part or whole, and natives who have described and photographed the interior, there can be no doubt of the general appearance of the inside and the nature of the contents.

There being no remarkable architectural features I refrain from describing the general appearance of the Mosque, but extract from Vambery the following particulars regarding the interior. Having entered a great quadrangle flagged with gravestones, the pilgrim must wash in the small ornamental house in the centre and then proceed through the eastern archway. He then finds himself under the huge cupola of the Imam's Mosque, an immense chamber floored in marble and covered with rich carpets. "The walls are adorned with the rarest trinkets and jewels; here an aigrette of diamonds, there a sword

and shield studded with rubies and emeralds, rich old bracelets, large massive candelabra, necklaces of immense value." Beyond are three doors, one of silver, one of gold plates studded with precious stones, and the third of carpet sewn with pearls. Passing through these the pilgrim finds himself in the presence of the Tomb itself, "and it is indeed a singular and sublime spectacle to see how these rude sons of Asia kiss with unfeigned tenderness the fretwork of the grating, the pavement, and especially the great padlock which hangs from the door." Under the same roof with the Imam's sepulchre is the sarcophagus under which repose the ashes of Harun-el-Rashid. The illustrious Khalif was buried here before the shrine had acquired sanctity by the deposit of the remains of the Imam, and every pious Shiah is said contemptuously to kick the tomb of the despised Sunni to make good his pilgrimage and deserve the revered title of "Meshedi."

Leaving the interior of the Mosque, I propose to explain something of its economy and the practices that have arisen owing to the large number of pilgrims who travel from far and wide to honour the shrine. Not only do the living arrive in their thousands, but the dead also are brought or sent for interment within the sacred enclosure. Payment obtains burial space for a corpse, rates varying according to proximity to the tomb of the Imam. The flagstones that compose the floor of the large quadrangle are each a tablet recording the name and status of some defunct believer who came here to die, or whose relatives have dutifully caused his remains to be transported for burial in holy ground. It is one of the sights of travel in Persia to meet horsemen carrying across their saddles a long and heavy package, the earthly residue of some departed friend or relative. Many a needy pilgrim by thus encumbering himself is able to raise sufficient money to complete the journey. It does not affect his

A Persian Gateway.

A Potter's Shop.

sleep at night to have such a cold bedfellow; rather it adds to his consciousness of merit that he is making the pilgrimage under such difficult circumstances. The result of this custom is that Meshed is unknown feet deep with human bones, for not only are the precincts of the Mosque used for burial, but all around the enclosure are wide spaces crammed to overflowing with departed saints. Owing to the great demand for space it is a rule that whenever a flagstone falls in the spot becomes available for another occupant.

Another curious custom that doubtless adds not a little to the attraction of Meshed as a place of pilgrimage is the temporary wife system. The pilgrim who comes from afar, who has braved the hardships of the desert, and suffered long deprivation from the comforts of home and family, is permitted to take unto himself a wife for the period of his stay. The ecclesiastical authorities recognise that he has earned some material as well as spiritual solace, and provide for him a large assortment of ladies whose profession it is to comfort these aged and travel-stained worthies. The Mullah draws up a contract, a sum is paid to the wife, and the union is legally accomplished. Curzon notes that a *sigheh*, or temporary wife, "may be married for any period from one day to ninety-nine years," but when he further suggests that many pilgrims look forward to "a good spree," doubtless he did not mean to refer to those contracts which lasted for ninety years or over. The usual periods adopted in the contracts are two and four weeks, and fourteen days after completion the lady is free to contract for a further spell of matrimony. For those women favoured by the priestly sanction life is thus one long honeymoon.

To some extent Meshed has moved with the times, far though it is from the busy West. Over the entrance to the Mosque is a large European clock looking down upon the busy strip of bazaar that gives approach to the

gateway. Then the Mosque itself is lit by electricity, generated by an engine situated outside the limits, and stoked by a Russian with coals obtained from the neighbouring hills. The lightning thus stored up, and employed when wanted, adds no little to the prestige of the Mullahs with their simple visitors from primitive parts of Persia. Miracles have always been a feature of the attractions at the Mosque, numerous instances having occurred where the lame have walked and the blind have seen. Bigoted though the Mahomedan is supposed to be, he has a keen eye for phenomena that savour of the supernatural, and a shrewd idea of the character of the Mullahs under whose auspices the miracles happen.

The revenues of the shrine are supposed to be something like £20,000 per annum, drawn from property situated in all parts of Persia. Besides the fixed income, there are of course the fees obtained from the pilgrims, and legacies bequeathed by defunct believers. Altogether, a very large amount of money must pass annually through the hands of the Mosque authorities. In addition to 600 paid servants, the Mosque supports many mullahs, while one thousand hangers-on gain a living by presents extorted from the unfortunate pilgrims. In return for all he spends the pilgrim is gratuitously fed for three days, but thereafter he must pay his way.

The precincts of the Mosque are *bast*, a term which recent occurrences in Persia will have made familiar to readers. It will be remembered that when reformers in Teheran took up an attitude of opposition to the existing form of government, they began by closing the bazaars and putting a stop to all business. This course, under an absolute monarchy, laid them open to official reprisals, and to escape consequences they all took refuge in our Legation grounds. International usage regards Embassies and Legations as so many patches of ground

actually the territory of the country whose flag is flown. We therefore regarded the Persian refugees within the Legation walls precisely as if they had landed on the shores of Great Britain or on any British possession. No foreign Power could lay a finger on them, and they could not be sent back to their own country except under the law of extradition, which cannot be enforced, I understand, for political, but only for criminal, offences. The Persians, however, regarded the Legation grounds as *bast*, or sanctuary, and from their point of view, once they had been allowed to enter the gates no possible justification could arise for their ejectment.

Bast is one of the oldest institutions in Persia, as indeed it has always been throughout the Orient, and, in old-fashioned times, in Europe. All sacred buildings in Persia are *bast*, as also are, curiously enough, the stables of the king or of any member of the royal family. Another place of sanctuary used to be the Meidan-i-Tupkhaneh, or Gun Square, in Teheran. In recent years the telegraph offices throughout the country have been regarded as safe places of refuge, on the ground that all the telegraph wires are supposed to run directly into the royal palace, where the Shah spends his time listening to the petitions of his subjects and the reports of his officers from all parts of the kingdom.

Once within the sacred enclosure at Meshed the malefactor finds all he needs in the world. Shops of every kind, baths, matrimonial facilities—for this purpose a rascal is as good as a pilgrim—spiritual comfort, are all to be found if he has money to pay for them. And while enjoying a pleasant holiday the sinner can negotiate with his pursuers for future immunity. It has been said that *bast* will protect Christians, Jews, and Parsis, but on this point there is no certainty.

Besides being Consul-General, our representative at Meshed is Agent to the Governor-General of India.

The interests of India being chiefly concerned, it is natural that officers belonging to the Indian services should usually be employed at Meshed, and as a rule members of the Indian Political Department are appointed. Major Kennion, who is Consul-General at Seistan, and who is only acting for the well-known Persian traveller, Major P. M. Sykes, is assisted by a Vice-Consul, who combines with that post the duties of medical officer to the Agency. Captain W. R. Battye belongs to the Indian Medical Service, and is, needless to say, a member of that remarkable family which for generations has given so many sons to the army in India. There is, besides, Captain Smyth, who commands the escort, and generally assists in looking after the important British interests centred in Meshed. Three ladies and five children complete the British population inside the Legation grounds. Near by live the two English officials of the Imperial Bank of Persia, and in the telegraph office is a single English operator.

The Russian Consulate has a staff about equal in number to our own. At the Customs are several Belgian officials with their wives and families, and altogether there are some sixty foreigners resident in Meshed. So the elements of a polite social existence are comparatively abundant, and Mrs Kennion's garden-parties are tremendously popular. Mrs Kennion is a great sportswoman, being no less than Golf Lady Champion of England, and has introduced badminton for the delectation of her guests, who every Thursday skip violently and delightedly after the nimble shuttlecock, regardless of age or nationality. In winter these pleasant afternoons come early to an end, but then there is adjournment to the drawing-room, where the British method of tea-drinking and eating cakes is no less acceptable than the badminton out of doors. I mention these amenities because so much has been said

and written about the social difficulties where British, Russians, and Belgians dwell together not exactly in amity, that it is pleasant to be able to record the existence of at least one happy family in Persia. In Meshed at any rate, whatever may be the official feelings, the people concerned are wise enough and good-natured enough not to let them interfere with personal relations.

Having dilated upon the strategic and ecclesiastical attributes of Meshed, I now turn to what may be called the human side of things. No sooner had I arrived than I was informed that smallpox had been raging in the town, and it was intimated to me with great delicacy that vaccination was a highly proper precaution. I have always been an anti-vaccinationist; and as on arrival at Meshed I was already suffering from lumbago, toothache, wasp-bite, sunstroke, and liver, it was with some reluctance that I contemplated an addition to my family of physical afflictions. The five toddlers who dwelt in the Consulate grounds, aged from six years to one month, had, of course, to be considered, and it was while I was endeavouring to conquer my prejudices that the Inspector-General for Sanitation for the Province of Khorasan paid a friendly call, and made a statement which decided me to submit to the surgeon's knife. The important official named had related with professional pride that no less than 20,000 people in Meshed had died from smallpox during the course of the epidemic. I gathered that nothing would give this high functionary of the state more pleasure, or more effectually justify his office, than the demise of the whole population of Meshed. I then realised that there was no time to be lost, and soon afterwards I might have been found wandering about trying to avoid anything harder than floating feathers.

Meshed is a sink of corruption. Curzon speaks of

it as a city healthy in comparison to other places in Persia, which may be true. But if so, the other places must be unspeakable. The figures quoted above for death from smallpox were given in all seriousness by the Persian official, and while I do not doubt that they were greatly exaggerated it is a fact that a large and material fraction of the population did actually succumb. It was remarked while I was at Meshed that hardly any children were now to be seen playing on the streets, for it was among the little ones that the greatest mortality took place. For Europeans Meshed is a dangerous place. In the last few years several deaths have occurred amongst the small white population, while it is estimated that 25 per cent of the total are always on the sick-list. A low kind of fever seems the most prevalent form of sickness, but the fact is that everything is vitiated with decaying animal matter and the blood becomes poisoned, the effect showing itself according to the constitution of the sufferer. There must be something like 20,000 bodies buried every year within the walls of Meshed. This has been going on for centuries, layer upon layer, until the whole place has become one vast charnel-house. The air is always filled with the dust of the dead, while every drop of water in Meshed comes into the town by subterranean channels that traverse the neighbourhood of the overflowing burial-grounds. It may be that human dust is not inimical to human health, but what has to be remembered about Meshed is that a great number of the people buried in it have suffered from disease, and finding death approaching have come to lay their bones in sacred ground. Doctors tell us that the microbe dies very hard, and that after years of existence underground he can emerge again into the open and work his wicked will on the unfortunate, over-sanitationed white man.

Meshed has fifty mosques besides the one to which

all the Persian world gravitates. The others are mostly poor and miserable places, hardly to be distinguished from cattle-pens. Then there are 150 baths in Meshed. The *hammam* is quite an institution, and every good Mussulman is supposed to undergo a scrubbing once a week. As you walk along a street you see a low archway and steps descending into the bowels of the earth. Immediately inside the entrance are fierce pictures of Persian monarchs grasping lions and tigers by the throat, or thrusting swords into their vitals. These are generally done in red, which adds to the effect. Down below is the *hammam*. There is a legend that once a European entered one of these places and came out alive. He reported a very unpleasant odour, a tank which was never cleaned out until it had silted up to within two feet of the top, and a general appearance of dirt and undesirability. The attendants thump their patients when they have been well boiled, and then lay them out to dry and to recover from the effects of the battery. In the mud roof which covers a bath there are always holes in which are fixed lumps of coloured glass, so that, being underground and lighted in this dim way, the *hammam* is a mysterious and comforting place that appeals to the Persian, accustomed to the glare and dust of the desert.

Meshed is famous for its Khaiban, a street that runs from one end of the town to the other. Divided into two by a canal shaded by tall spreading trees, the double bazaar makes an attractive and interesting picture, for here go up and down all the people and all the wheeled traffic that cannot enter the covered bazaars. Of the canal Curzon has written in scathing terms, saying that it was a dirty ditch, and that it appeared to him "to unite the uses of a drinking-fountain, a place of bodily ablution and washing of clothes, a depository for dead animals, and a sewer."

Life at Meshed has many drawbacks. The difficulty of getting there is considerable, for it entails a railway journey across Europe to Baku, or a steamer trip to the Black Sea and then railway to Baku. Here it is necessary to embark on the Caspian, a sea liable to heavy storms, which, having crossed, the railway must again be taken to Askabad. From there a most unpleasant drive of four or five days' duration awaits the traveller. The minimum time in which the journey can be accomplished is fifteen days, but, as many things happen on ways that traverse Russian territory, it is seldom that it can be completed so quickly. The bringing of baggage by rail overland through Europe is an exceedingly expensive business, and if you send it by goods train the Russians mulct you for prohibitive duty at the frontier. It should here be remarked that it is one of the avowed principles of Russian administration in Central Asia to prevent the import of British goods, to which end not only do the Russians impose enormous duty, but they decline to extend the usual privilege of transit without duty when the goods are bound for a third country. Thus everything wanted from England by British residents in Meshed must come through Quetta or Bunder Abbas, entailing land journeys of 1050 and 970 miles respectively in addition to the sea voyage. The merest necessaries of life, like whisky, oatmeal, and suchlike, thus cost for transport more than their original price. And when breakages are taken into account the expense becomes phenomenal. I believe it is now possible for articles dispatched by parcels post to escape Russian duty, but as the postage is very high and the limit of size very low, the accruing advantage is not worth much.

Having got to Meshed from London at a cost of about £60, the newly arrived resident does not find very much to make life interesting. Tennis, and riding

over rough desert, are the only forms of exercise, unless walking attracts him. The sights of Meshed are soon exhausted, and then it is necessary to settle down to a course of study of Persian affairs, made easy by the existence of an excellent and well-stocked library at the Consulate. In the neighbourhood a very little shooting is possible, a brace of pigeon or partridge, a hare, or a bustard being the only result likely in an afternoon's tramp. By going far afield duck can be found, and gazelle. When I was at Meshed, Major Kennion had not long returned from a trip into the mountains of Bujnurd, where he had shot some fine sheep of what apparently is a new species. The horns, which measured about 35 inches, curve backward like those of the *ammon*, but in coming forward point outward like those of the *poli*.

I was interested to learn from Major Kennion that the whole of the Kopet Dagh range, dividing Persia from Transcaspia, is alive with game, including wild sheep of at least two species, ibex, stag resembling the *bara singh*, and smaller deer of various kinds. Inland from those mountains is to be found a variety of ibex with horns that instead of being ribbed in the ordinary way have four or five knobs along their length at intervals of several inches, presumably *Capra ægagrus*. Snow leopards are very plentiful, and altogether it would seem as if the Kopet Dagh was well worthy a visit from the sportsman. As the whole of this range looks down on the Transcaspian railway, from which the shooting ground cannot be distant more than two days' march, the time required to get there would be less than is occupied in getting to the big-game grounds of India. Drawbacks would be getting guns and ammunition into the country. But as it would be necessary to get a permit from the Russian Foreign Office to enter Turkestan, and also from the Persian Government to

shoot in Bujnurd, the matter of the arms could be arranged at the same time.

An afternoon ride at Meshed for anybody official is a matter of some ceremony. When the Russian or British Consuls-General, or any of their staff, ride abroad, they must be accompanied by an escort, for which purpose we have about twenty sowars of a Bombay regiment, under a jemadar, stationed at Meshed. At one time an armed escort was a necessity, for Meshed used to be a very jumpy place, and it was never quite certain that a fanatical outburst against Europeans might not occur. But in these days the natives have become accustomed to foreigners, and the escort is now more a matter of keeping up prestige than a necessity. It does not do, however, to underestimate the possibilities of a row, and the removal of our own or the Russian Cossack escort would never do. The mullahs connected with the Mosque are mostly great rogues who exist by unblushing exploitation of the pilgrim. They are surrounded by swarms of menials who are the lowest and least desirable class of the Persian people. They all hate the foreigner, for it is he and his ideas that continually tend to enlighten the population and to render the ecclesiastical influence less paramount. This has been particularly so in Teheran, where the numbers of foreigners resident has generally lowered the position of the priesthood. Meshed is still completely under the thumb of the Mullah, though the gentleman well knows that a wider comprehension of things and affairs is slowly and surely permeating the people. The foreigner is at the bottom of it all, and if the Mullah of Meshed could have a smack at him without fear of consequences there would be trouble at once. So the sowar and the Cossack, besides being ornamental, are useful as earnests of power behind.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAUGHT IN A BLIZZARD.

THE attractions of Meshed exhausted, it is necessary to study how to move onward. I had long decided to make straight for Teheran, and it only remained to choose how to go. The Persian Consul at Askabad had assured me that a *diligence* ran between Meshed and Teheran. The wife and family of a friend of his had recently accomplished the journey—558 miles—in this manner in seven days' time. I hated the idea of further driving, but the *diligence* sounded cheap and quick, and I would most assuredly have gone by it if I could have found a single soul in Meshed who could tell me where and when it was to be found. But on mentioning to my friends that I calculated to travel to Teheran by a *diligence*, there came into their eyes that glassy and sullen expression that I well remember having seen as a boy on the face of a shopkeeper from whom, egged on by a mischievous comrade, I endeavoured to buy a pennyworth of dove's milk. Indeed, the *diligence* was a figment of the Consul's imagination, and if there was a glimmering of substance in the story it must have been that the wife and family travelled by a fourjon, the huge Persian cart, which could not possibly compass the journey in less than three weeks.

When I came down to realities I found that the best way to get to Teheran was by carriage, a fair-sized landau,

with relays of horses capable of completing the distance in six or seven days, costing a mere trifle like £41. If I were content with a horrid little phaeton, which offered small comfort and no protection against weather, I could have that for about £32. These were the only ways by which a gentleman might get from Meshed to Teheran, and without a servant, and encumbered with a minimum of luggage, I might hope to arrive at an expense of £60. Tips to post-boys and certain expenses on the road were inevitable. It vexed my economic soul to contemplate such waste of money, combined with the utter discomfort entailed by carriage travelling.

I asked about caravans, and was told that they took twenty-four days to reach Teheran, and that it was a fearsome and unheard-of method of travelling. I tried to buy my own horses, but put this idea behind me on finding that a person living at the Consulate was expected to pay on a special scale. But perseverance is a national trait, particularly where the saving of money is concerned, and in the end I found an individual who would hire two horses and two mules of so superlative an excellence that they would take me and my goods to Teheran in sixteen days, for £15. Straightway I hired one Suliman, of Hazara birth, to be my cook and courier, his qualifications for these duties being a complete ignorance of cooking, and a knowledge of three-and-thirty words of Hindustani. The proprietor of my caravan gave me a long written contract agreeing to do any mortal thing I asked him, and to arrive without fail on the appointed date. My Meshed friends grinned at the idea of our riding the same nags to Teheran in sixteen days, and Mr Muleteer flattered himself he had got 50 per cent more than the proper price by agreeing to do a thing that he thought the Sahib would never have the stomach to do. But he little knew what a hard-seated customer he had chanced upon. I vowed to stick to

schedule, and eventually we actually did reach Teheran within two hours of the contract time, Shaik Abdul declaring that never again would he hope to get the better of a Sahib with a red beard. A red beard is a precious possession in Persia, signifying vitality in a young man and sanctity in an old.

Preparations for the road once more were a mingled delight and pain. Having already thrown away my cooking paraphernalia at Tashkent, I had now to buy a new lot of pots and pans, knives and forks, new saddle-bags, new bridles, new everything, except saddle, for I was fortunate enough to find a comfortable cavalry one that wanted conveyance to its owner at Teheran. Suliman proved to be somewhat in the hands of local shopkeepers, but all things considered he did very well. He was a bullet-headed, bandy-legged little ruffian, with a strong penchant for Egyptian cigarettes and any kind of cigars. The Hazaras live in the centre of Afghanistan, but there is a colony of them in Meshed doing menial work for the Persians. Judging by his appearance Suliman must have come of an ancestral line that got entangled with Mongolian blood in the days of Genghiz or Timour, for his eyes were slit and oblique. In other respects he was normally Central Asian. In character he was curiously pious, stupendously stupid, and mildly dishonest.

Shaik Abdul came to see me daily to explain that the nags were being fed like fighting-cocks, and to ask for a trifle on account. Suliman and I were each to ride a horse, one mule carried my baggage, and the other mule bore Abdul and the remainder of my goods. Besides, there was an assistant coming with a donkey, which was to carry sundries belonging to the caravan. I asked how could a donkey keep pace with 14-hand mules and keep on doing forty miles a-day. Shaik Abdul said there was no bottom to a good ass, and this one was a regular

Shaitan, devouring farsakhs as easily as a woman swallows flattery—a farsakh equals four linear miles, so the comparison is not so offensive as might appear. And, indeed, it turned out to be a marvellous little brute, that always led the way and kept the whole caravan on the trot.

One bright December morning we fared forth, accompanied from Meshed by some friends who had been kind enough to send tiffin to a village a few miles ahead. There were the usual pack troubles at the start, and Shaik Abdul's assistant disappeared at the last moment, just when all was ready. This in Persia is a sign of an affectionate husband, and although I was greatly enraged at the delay, I felt that it would be wicked, not to say indecorous, to interfere with the course of true love. Not until the whole caravan was clear of the city walls did I feel satisfied that we were really under weigh. And then I allowed myself to rejoice freely, for a new country lay before me, a stout nag carried me, and the responsibilities of civilisation were to be forgotten during two solid weeks. It was a long and arduous journey that lay in front, 95 per cent of it across desert, where the heat of the sun by day was fierce and unrelenting, while the nights and early mornings promised bitter cold. And yet there is no joy like the joy of the road. One forgets the toil and hardships, the bad food and the uncomfortable lodging, in the intoxication of fresh air and untrammelled freedom. It is hard to analyse the feeling, but who that has ever travelled but has been possessed by it? Perhaps the keen pleasure of setting forth is partly due to reaction from the worry of preparation, and partly to the sense of mental relief consequent on commitment to a settled plan of action. And the mind set at rest, the senses take their fill of the infinite charms that continually present themselves to the susceptible temperament.

Curzon makes it 558 miles from Meshed to Teheran,

and if this distance was to be compassed in sixteen days we must do 35½ miles per diem. The general direction was due west, but the first few stages out the road made a southerly bend to avoid the tail-end of a range of mountains that bars the straight way. With the vain idea of saving six miles I decided to take a short cut over the mountains—mountains are like drink or opium; once under their spell you are enthralled for ever—and strike the road at the ancient and famous city of Nishapur. It was nothing to me, in the jubilation of starting afresh, that the dark purple mass lying on the plain before us was capped by dazzling white. I had long forgotten the adventure in the shadow of Kinchinjunga, and the tumble down the icy slopes of the Terek Pass. Why has Providence given a horse so much more sense than a man? The one will shy for the rest of his life at a thing that has once injured him; but a man in like case flutters round and round the danger until he falls in and is drowned, or burnt, or frozen like Australian mutton. These moralisings foretell, I will not say an adventure, but the arising of a situation that might have had serious consequences. That we escaped is proved by the fact that these pages continue to iterate damnably.

Having arrived at the hamlet where my friends' servants waited, we climbed to the roof of a house and there made a good tiffin, the golden dome of the distant mosque at Meshed glowing like a bonfire in the east, while in the west the ultramarine of the sky took deeper tones by contrast with the snowy range that seemed to float 'twixt heaven and earth. Around was nothing but yellow sand, marked with one long, faint, undulating line that stretched toward the Holy City. On this track were dotted little parties of wayfarers. Having cantered ahead, we were in front of my caravan, and were able to watch it slowly crawling towards us.

When it came up I said good-bye to my Meshed friends, and, mounting, fell in behind the donkey, which was pricking across the desert with a nimbleness that forced horses and mules to do their best. While having tiffin my nag had chosen to roll in the dust and break the strings that fastened my Burberry to the saddle. The tree of the saddle itself being already broken, it came to no additional harm. But the servant who rescued the coat hung it up on a fence, so that when I left it was forgotten, the loss being discovered when we halted for the night, fifteen miles farther on. The losing of the coat was an omen of ill-fortune.

From the place of eating we marched across the remainder of the plain, and then plunged in among the foothills that projected from the main range. No sooner had we left the desert than the scenery began to improve, and a huge dam indicated the presence of man. Two low hills had been joined by a massive wall, in which only a small opening had been left for the passage of the stream. Doubtless the opening is controlled and the water preserved on the upper side, though at a little distance away I could see no sign of the dam being used to flood the flats above. Beyond the dam was a small valley full of trees, and distinguished by a high rock surmounted by an ancient and ruined fortress. The village was called Gulistan, and in the distance the houses looked no less picturesque than the euphony of the name suggested. But we were late, and had to pass to the east of this ancient settlement in order to reach our halting-place for the night.

At the top of the first important ridge we came to a burying-ground covered with stones marking the last resting-place of true believers. Here was a little tent from which came forth no sound. It was closed on the side from which we approached, and I wondered what it was doing there. But no sooner did the sound of our

An overflowing burial-ground at Meshed—see page 406.

"If the late lamented possessed any virtue at all, I feel sure that these two old boys must have successfully interceded for him at the gate of Paradise"—see page 417.

horses' feet reach the inmates than they immediately began diligently to read the Koran in loud voices. When we advanced beyond the tent we could see into the other side, and there beheld two old mullahs hard at work. So busy were they that I was able to dismount and bring the camera to bear without their taking any notice. The poor old fellows had been having a snooze in the sun when we came up, and did their best to pretend that they had never relaxed for a moment. When Suliman called out that their pictures had been taken they looked up in astonishment, not to say disbelief. I expected that they would be displeased, but evidently they belonged to the good-natured branch of humanity, for they just cackled a little, and then returned to vigorous reading. If the late lamented possessed any virtue at all, I feel sure that these two old boys must have successfully interceded for him at the gate of Paradise.

Every mile now brought us deeper and deeper into the mountains, and before long we found ourselves in a narrow valley along which the only road appeared to be the bed of a stream. The surrounding hills were thickly wooded, while grass and undergrowth clothed the slopes. Though the season was almost mid-winter, the scenery was charming and picturesque beyond belief to anybody whose experience of Persia was limited to the Meshed-Askabad road. Every step enhanced the combined wildness and beauty of the track, which continued to cross and recross the little stream that tumbled along in the usual noisy and romping manner of highland burns. I had seen nothing like this since my journey in Sikhim, which I take to be beyond compare the most beautiful country in the world. This little Persian glen was an exact miniature of the stupendous but exquisite valleys that are such a feature of Himalayan scenery. And there was evidence, too, that at certain seasons the little burn became a raging torrent,

carrying all before it with the violence of the raging floods that are the consequence of rain on the slopes of the Himalayas.

After some miles of winding in and out between wooded slopes that grew ever higher and more precipitous, we suddenly found ourselves in a village clinging to either side of the gorge, and in places prevented from falling into the bed of the stream only by wooden scaffolding that held the houses in position. This was Jagherk, which Suliman informed me was so called because people had so often been drowned there. The houses were quaint and curious, the stones of which they are built and the carved woodwork reminding one irresistibly of the architecture of Thibet, and particularly of the Chumbi Valley. Clinging to the side of the hill, the houses rise one behind the other in terraces, so that the ground floor of one is flush with the roof of the next below. It was all totally different from my conception of anything Persian, and as great a surprise as any traveller could wish to encounter. Besides the charm of its appearance, Jagherk positively reeked of the aromatic scent of garnered apples. Suliman told me that the people here did no work except sell firewood and apples to the inhabitants of Meshed; and I wondered if in the whole world it would be possible to find a community devoted to cleaner or more gentlemanly business.

Suliman interviewed various people as we threaded our way along the narrow track that intervened between the houses and the river-bed. There seemed considerable difficulty about finding accommodation, not because accommodation did not exist, but because nobody would part with any information until he had conversed at length with Suliman, and obtained from him a long statement regarding my worldly position, whence I had come, and whither I went. These communications I always cut short with an order to proceed, doubting not

that when we came to a man who had room for us he would first secure our patronage and thereafter be content to satisfy his curiosity. And so it came to pass, for where a narrow rift in the towering hillside gave a little extra room, there was a tiny caravanserai, the owner of which bade us turn aside in the name of God and take shelter from the coming night. Sad to relate, the light was too far gone to permit of a photograph of this delightful spot, so I climbed up a steep path by the side of a leaping cascade, entered a yard, and, after various windings and scrambling up ladders, found myself in a little apartment looking down on the tops of the houses below. Opposite was a rocky and precipitous hillside covered with moss, ferns, and bushes. Below, the burn sang lustily in its course over the brown stones, and a rustic bridge seemed just to complete a picture absolutely quaint and charming. Jagherk henceforth remains in my memory as one of the places, of which there are many throughout the world, where, when the fever of living is spent, one might well pass the evening of one's days. There comes a day when the ceaseless energy of mind and body gives way to the desire for restful contemplation, and to whom that peaceful time comes I commend Jagherk as a quiet haven, with its delightful harmony of colour for the eye, its slow-moving people and its brown-eyed darting children, its melodious little river, and the permeating, fascinating smell of the apples.

The creature comforts of Jagherk were not perhaps so satisfying as its appearance. But it would ill become a traveller to discount the entertainment provided for his æsthetic soul by dwelling upon the lack of spacious quarters or ambrosial provender. The view from the little latticed window compensated for any scarcity of material consolations. Nevertheless Jagherk had its dark side, for when morning dawned lowering clouds

filled the sky, and, where the previous evening the setting sun had lit up the soft and warm colours of autumn, the morning showed a gloomy and threatening gorge. No sooner had we set forth than rain began to fall, and then I missed the Burberry badly. A rug thrown over my shoulders protected me to some extent, but once more I knew the dolefulness of wet knees. Forbidding though the day was, it was impossible to deny the charm of the narrow gorge through which the track wound in and out, always in the bed of the little stream. One spur that commanded a fine view down the valley was surmounted by a neat two-storeyed bungalow with wide verandahs. In this building I recognised the summer residence erected by Major Sykes to provide the good folk at the Meshed Consulate with a place of refuge when the heat of the plain became unbearable. A more delightful spot could hardly be imagined, and I was again reminded of the Himalayas and the dainty hill-stations perched far up in the clouds.

Continuing up the gorge, the scenery suddenly changed, and from hillsides clothed with green we entered a region entirely devoid of vegetation. The rain that had been falling gave way to sleet driven by a high wind that blew straight into our faces. It became cold and miserable, and nothing could be seen of the surrounding mountains because of thick swirling mist that enveloped them. We pressed on up the gorge in that frame of mind which ceases to take cognisance of anything but the discomforts that assail cherished portions of the body. From my knees the wet gradually worked its way upward, and when at last I knew there was no keeping the saddle dry I took refuge in philosophic indifference. Then came the trickle down the neck, and after that the deluge might have come for all I cared. Fortunately I had distrusted the morning,

and wore a big shooting-jacket with a sheepskin waistcoat underneath, else the subsequent cold might have ended my career entirely.

Climbing ever upward into the mountains, we found that we were in for a regular storm. The sleet gave place to snow, which was borne on furious blasts that rose and died away with curious inconsequence. After combating one fierce attack, we were overjoyed to come upon an old caravanserai where two men and a woman had taken refuge. They had built a small fire, and Suliman and myself were invited to partake of the genial warmth. I tried to dry myself, but with little success, for the fire was no more than a collection of twigs and dung. The travellers were crossing the mountains with some bales of a sweetmeat made of dried apricot and walnuts. They gave me a lump of this tough but succulent composition, and advised us to return to Jagherk, because the pass could not be crossed in such weather. They had been at it all night, and were thankful to have escaped with their lives. I was interested to observe that one of the men carried a gun, and that the lady was unveiled—the first woman's face I had seen in Persia. Needless to say it was not a young face, but I observed it with attention—I am no chicken myself—for the eternal feminine frequently remains attractive long after the meridian of life is past. The poor woman was wet and draggled, dog-tired from exertion and want of sleep, yet the eyes that shyly dropped before mine were kind and trusting. And when I bade Suliman ask her if she were very tired, she replied in a voice that was low and clear, and with a wistful little smile, that she was in the hands of God. It was a saint-like answer, and not at all incompatible, in Persia, with experience of one-and-twenty husbands.

Shortly afterwards the woman mounted her donkey, her man shouldered his gun, and the trio went out into

the snow, hoping soon to reach warmth and shelter at Jagherk. Their last words were an earnest injunction not to attempt the pass, advice for which we thanked them. Suliman would have liked perhaps to return, but he is a faithful creature, and made no objection to proceeding. During a lull in the storm we mounted and rode slowly up a narrow chasm, the bed of which was full of rocks and stones half-covered with newly fallen snow. Here we were out of the wind that raged above, but the going was horrid, and we were compelled after a while to dismount and lead the horses. So far there had been no difficulty in finding the way, but we now entered an open basin into which ran various ravines. Which to follow it was impossible to know, and here, where there was no shelter, we could only see a short distance ahead owing to the thickness of the driving snow.

Selecting the most likely ravine we proceeded, finding marching very difficult owing to the roughness of the ground and the depth of the snow. After half an hour of exhausting climbing in this abominable gully it became quite clear that we had lost the way. We were on the slope of a high mountain which evidently had to be crossed somewhere. Having ascended a considerable way, it was most disheartening to go back and search for the track, and then to have to regain the same elevation at, perhaps, some spot quite near. So we made a flank movement, hoping to strike signs of the path. We wandered about for nearly an hour, and then I slipped over a small precipice and fell plump into a snowdrift some fifteen feet below. The reins were jerked from my fingers, and when I regained my feet it was to see my nag disappearing into the thickness beyond. I roared out to Suliman, whom I was just able to see ghostlike through the driving snow. He waited until I reached him, and then I took his horse while he went

to search for mine. He did not come back for a long time, during which the storm got wilder, and the snow had been replaced by driving particles of ice that it was quite impossible to face. When I saw Suliman coming back with my horse I moved my head, and then I realised that my beard was frozen into a solid block of ice. The cold was very great, and nothing but the fact that we had been climbing and keeping up circulation prevented us from perishing. We were now in a predicament the seriousness of which could no longer be ignored. We had wandered so far from our original line that there could be little chance of finding the way back to the ruined caravanserai. Besides, we were on rocky ground, where it was dangerous to move about owing to precipices that might not always have snowdrifts below to break a fall. Such places were topped by square banks of snow that treacherously fell away when stepped upon.

Just when things looked very bad indeed, and when we had really become indifferent to what might happen, there was a lull in the wind, the snow ceased, and we got a glimpse of the surrounding hills. We were on a spur of the big mountain, whose top was still enveloped in flying clouds. The break only lasted for a couple of minutes, but in that time Suliman happened to cast his eye upon the next spur, and there beheld a faint suggestion of zigzag path. Before obscurity descended upon us again we decided that this must be the track leading to the pass, for though covered with snow there were indications of a continuous line that could hardly be natural. We made straight for the line, and, after a fearful scramble, arrived to find that we had really struck a mule-path. On the way my horse fell into a snowdrift, and we had great trouble digging him out, for the more he plunged the deeper he went in. This occurrence had a most unfortunate result, for the

poor brute strained himself badly, though we did not find it out for some time.

Once on the track again, we commenced ascending a high rounded bluff that was completely exposed to the wind. We had the greatest difficulty in getting the horses to face it, for the driven particles of ice lashed like whips. With our heads down we toiled on, knowing that our only salvation lay in movement, and in attaining the southern side of the mountains. To go back was hopeless, for the gorges and ravines below must now have been rendered impassable by the falling snow. The cold penetrated through everything, and I remember that very moment when my hands became so numbed that I could no longer tell whether my nose was frozen or not. Curiously, the prospect of losing one's extremities, and perhaps one's life, did not trouble one at all. What remained of consciousness was entirely devoted to the physical struggle against the slippery ground and the relentless ice-laden blizzard. There was one fearful blast to overcome when we reached the top of the ridge, and then we plunged over the other side into a long deep gorge that gave shelter. We had crossed the summit of the pass, and were now clear of danger.

Two hours of scrambling down horrid river-beds, during which we passed through snow and sleet, and finally rain, brought us to a delightful valley bathed in lovely sunshine and resting beneath a blue and cloudless sky. Looking back into the mountains, we saw that their tops were hidden by huge dark clouds that hung like a pall far down the slopes. We had come from up there, and we had been lucky to escape, for at the village of Dehrud they told us that people caught by storms in the pass were frequently frozen to death. In Curzon's map the range is named the Binalud Kuh, and though the name of the pass is not

given in his book, he says this route from Meshed to Nishapur ascends to 10,720 feet. Curzon does not give his authority for the height of this pass, and I would be surprised to hear that its actual height is over 9000 feet. Whatever the height, however, it is profitless as a short-cut to Nishapur, though if the traveller wants scenery let him go by Jagherk, carefully selecting a day when no storm threatens. Suliman despaired of seeing our caravan that evening, and we felt sure that Shaik Abdul would have had the sense to stop somewhere on the way. But to our astonishment they turned up late at night, very much the worse for wear, but alive and safe. The men's faces, as well as Suliman's, were all cut and bleeding from the driving ice, but a Persian is a grand traveller and thinks nothing of such a trifle.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ROAD IN PERSIA.

THE descent to Dehrud was exceedingly rough, and quite unrelieved by interesting scenery. The hillsides seemed to be nothing but debris, capable of supporting no vegetation of any kind. It was only when we had dropped a considerable distance that we entered a zone where a change occurred, and where bushes and low trees struggled for an existence in the soil. Gradually the surroundings improved, and then we suddenly found ourselves at the debouchure of the narrow valley which led down from the pass above, and gazing upon the wide plain of Nishapur, famous throughout history as one of the paradises of Iran. Dehrud is just at the point where the valley opens out, and where the stream from the mountains can be utilised for irrigation. As a village it resembles to some extent the picturesque Jagherk, but being situated in more open ground, the houses are not piled on top of each other in the same quaint way. We were lucky here in finding excellent quarters and plenty of firewood. A roaring fire dried our clothes, and a cup of tea warmed our insides; and I felt more than ever convinced that toil and hardship are well worth endurance for the sake of the infinite capacity to appreciate physical comfort which they engender.

We left Dehrud early the next morning, and after

proceeding a short distance I realised that my horse was lame. I dismounted and looked at his feet. Sure enough there was a stone, and, having picked it out, I gave Suliman a lecture on veterinary science, ending up with the remark that Sahibs habitually forgot more about horses than Iranis or Hazaras or Hindustanis ever knew. He acknowledged that Sahibs were great hakeems, but he added that my horse was still lame. I pointed out that the bruise in the frog must continue to be tender, but that it soon would get better. Here we saw two flocks of pigeons numbering each several hundreds. I spent over an hour trying to get at them with the gun, Suliman remarking that they were as cute as mullahs. Eventually I got a couple of brace by crawling to within a hundred yards and, from behind a wall, firing one barrel into the air. Instantly the pigeons got up, but having seen nothing dangerous they did not know which way to fly; and the shot coming raining down on the far side, they inclined towards me. Thus does mind triumph over matter.

Leaving the outskirts of Dehrud, we soon found ourselves in the inevitable desert, and after six hours' riding entered Nishapur. My horse was very lame, and I had to give up the idea of visiting the tomb of Omar Khayam, which lies a couple of miles off the road. There is, however, nothing to see, for the grave is utterly neglected, and indeed Persians abhor the name of Omar to such an extent that its possession entirely discredits the poet who bears it. There is, of course, nothing remarkable in the poetry of Omar from a Persian point of view, and his fame in English-speaking countries is almost entirely due to Fitzgerald's masterly translation. Nevertheless, I had desired to gaze on the hallowed spot, and to beseech the ghost of the departed singer to endow me with somewhat of the spirit of

song. That I was unable to obtain my wish is probably apparent from the poverty of these pages.

But Nishapur cannot be passed by lightly. Curzon hints that it was founded by a great grandson of Noah, and Alexander the Great surely destroyed it about two thousand years ago. Since then it has been razed to the ground more often than any known city in the world, Mongols, Tartars, Turkomans, and Afghans repeatedly massacring the inhabitants and annihilating the town. Incidentally, it was once the capital of Mahmud of Ghuzni, and in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth centuries it was laid low by earthquakes. Reliable historians record that in its palmy days it rivalled Cairo and Baghdad, in olden time the most famous cities in the East. Its population then may have been half a million. To-day no more than 10,000 dwell within its neglected gates.

Nishapur has one great claim to notice, for in its neighbourhood are situated the most famous turquoise mines in the world, supplying 99 per cent of the total quantity reaching the market for precious stones. In spite of the numbers that are found, it is almost impossible to buy good turquoises at the mines for anything like the market value. The best finds are invariably sent to London, where they can always be bought more cheaply than in Persia—so at least has been the verdict of all travellers who have written upon the subject. At Meshed it is possible to procure any quantity of inferior stones, but only at absurd prices. When a good stone is offered, one may be sure it has been kept in a moist place to preserve the rich azure colour, and that when the buyer puts it in his pocket it will quickly fade to a sickly green. Turquoise is most commonly found in the shape of veins in solid rock, which it is necessary to break with care in order to get at the precious deposit. A common plan is to offer to the unsophisticated buyer a

Persian fourgons crossing the frontier mountains.

The Walls of Nishapur.

lump of quartz with the suggestion that inside is a valuable piece of turquoise. But the seller, knowing exactly by experience what the probabilities are, only parts with what he well knows contains nothing of value. In recent years the Persians have taken to breaking the rock with dynamite, which usually smashes far more turquoise than it reveals. Nodules and incrustations of turquoise are sometimes found adhering to the rock, and I remember some years ago in India handling what was supposed to be the biggest piece of turquoise ever discovered. This was an irregular lump about ten inches long and about six inches through at the thickest part, weighing several pounds. It was then, I think, the property of Messrs Arbuthnot, who valued it at half a lakh of rupees. The commoner turquoises found in the mines near Nishapur are sent in great numbers to Meshed, where are carved upon them texts from the Koran. They are then sold to pilgrims as amulets which will protect them from disasters ranging from stomach-ache to sudden death—according to the price paid. Some turquoises modify their colour in sympathy with the health of the owner, and others wax or wane in beauty to correspond with the degree in which the possessor retains the favour of his best-beloved. One of the last-named kind would be very handy to a lover, but hardly a desirable possession for the average husband.

Of the magnificent buildings that excited the admiration of ancient travellers to Nishapur there is now nothing visible, and in the absence of historical remains I went straight to the post office. I should here relate that when I arrived in Meshed I got a friend to speak to the Belgian official in charge of the Customs, and that I immediately obtained possession of the gun and ammunition handed over at the frontier. M. Augusts Molitor, when I went to call and thank him, did me the additional courtesy of giving me letters to postal officials likely to

be able to assist me during my journey to Teheran, the postal administration, it is necessary to explain, being under the control of the Customs Department. Hence the apparently original proceeding of making for the post office on my arrival at Nishapur. My letter quickly brought forth the postmaster, a gentle and amiable Persian, who at once placed his house at my disposal.

We were ushered upstairs into a large and pleasant room, carpeted with coloured felt and boasting a plain deal table and a few of the inevitable bentwood chairs, of which there seem to be millions in Persia. Suliman was given control in the kitchen, where he employed his own materials, for it is quite possible to be a guest in Persia and to make one's own arrangements for food. My host spent the evening with me, he smoking cigarettes, I writing up my diary. He could speak nothing but Persian, and as Suliman's duties, after a few minutes' interpretation, called him elsewhere, our power of communication was limited. Nevertheless he was always ready with a smile and a *bali, bali*—yes, yes—when I made a remark. Occasionally queer-looking people from the bazaar brought in a letter and a copper coin. They trusted my host to stamp and send the letter, and evinced none of the desire to put it in the slit that is inseparable from our idea of a post.

Having Shaik Abdul's assurance that my horse was quite well of his lameness, we made an early start on the following morning. I should here remark that we were now a day and a half behind schedule time, and that Shaik Abdul was a liar about the horse, which turned out to be lamer than ever. If at this stage I said it was not fit for riding, he would have said Bismillah, and I would be responsible for the breaking of the contract; while if the horse were really in danger of being damaged, he would be sure enough to

The Tower of Khosrugird, with Suliman sitting aloft - see page 141

The Khaiban of Meshed - see pages 107.

procure another. So, though hating to use the poor brute, I continued to ride him in the hope that he would get better. From Nishapur we took two days reaching Sebzevar, a town that used to contain 30,000 inhabitants, 20,000 of which died in a famine that occurred thirty years ago. Browning wrote of it—

> "By Sebzevar a certain pillar stands
> So aptly that its gnomon tells the hour;"

but pillar and gnomon were unfindable by me.

A few miles outside Sebzevar, however, there is an interesting tower, built in the year 1110 A.D. if the inscription is to be believed. This, in Kufic character, was translated by Curzon when he passed here nearly twenty years ago. The tower is called Khosrugird by the Persians, and was climbed by Fraser in 1822 and O'Donovan in 1880. But when Curzon was here I suppose it did not look inviting, for he reports the stairway in ruins. The lives of Suliman and myself were, however, of less importance to the Empire, and we chanced it, with the result that we got to the top in safety. I spent a quarter of an hour persuading Suliman to sit on the parapet with his legs dangling over a hundred feet of nothing. He remained paralysed in this position while I descended and took a photograph of him. When the camera had done its work I shouted to him to come down, but he was unable to shake off the paralysis, and I was compelled again to make the ascent in order to unglue him.

I so often refer to Curzon's 'Persia' that I feel it incumbent on me to acknowledge my debt to the distinguished author. He, like myself, entered Persia from Askabad and travelled to Meshed through Kuchan. From Meshed he took the same road to Teheran that I am now describing, except that portion over the mountains which nearly qualified me for cold storage. In Curzon's time

there existed what was called the *chapar* system of travelling, whereby saddle-horses were obtainable at each post-house, and it was feasible to ride day and night without ceasing. The post-houses still exist, and so do the horses, but it is no longer possible to hire them for riding. All the old post routes are now utilised for wheeled vehicles, and the horses are available only for carriages, to which they are harnessed four abreast. To say that the roads are fit for driving according to civilised ideas would be entirely misleading. But the carriages are all Russian, with marvellous springs, and the four horses are able to drag them at a slow pace over tracks by which a self-respecting drover in England would not drive cattle. The old *chapar* system, I understand, is abolished throughout Persia, thereby greatly detracting from the pleasure of travelling, as driving is dismal and abominable to a degree.

Needless to say that Curzon's description of the road includes everything of interest, and that his book is the standard work on most things relating to Persia. I had the good fortune to be able to borrow a copy for the journey, and I found it a mine of information, not only of his own observations but of those of every previous traveller. It is impossible to write of the appearance or history of anything without utilising Curzon, and I must needs confess that I continually made use of his compilation in so far as it refers to the road to Teheran. I would like to remark, too, that he was a fine traveller, who rode hard and roughed it like a good 'un, cooking his own food at night, going without breakfast in the morning, and sleeping on the floor like any plain man. Some of his chapters are devoted to political aspects which have now been greatly modified by the strategic change in the Russian position. But the descriptive parts of his book will remain good for many a day, and will always afford entertaining

reading. Despite the serious character of the writer, his book is illuminated by a slightly elephantine humour that is wholly delightful. One of my main objects is to catch him tripping, but so far he has given me no opportunity. When he does, I will enlarge upon it, for I feel somewhat piqued that he has left me so little occasion for original observation.

So far the chief trouble had been the lameness of my horse. We soon found that the cause was not a bruised foot but a strained forearm, the result of his tumble into the snowdrift when crossing the mountains. He generally started sound in the morning, but quickly developed lameness that usually became very pronounced towards evening. How many miles I tramped to save the leg it would be hard to say, but for 200 miles I walked every inch of downhill. The annoying thing was that Shaik Abdul insisted on my continuing to ride him, on the ground that he would get better all the quicker. Between shoulder and knee the leg was greatly swollen, and the poor brute must have suffered considerably. On this account I could not ask him to go long stages, and the result was that every day we fell further and further behind time—the responsibility being mine, not Shaik Abdul's, for he always expressed willingness to go on indefinitely. Then where I had hoped to do a certain amount of cantering I was now compelled to proceed at a walk, and that mostly on my own feet.

Fifty miles west of Sebzevar we entered a region that had long been a terror to travellers in the north of Persia. This mountainous tract is about a hundred miles broad, and is separated by only one important range from a region which once was the haunt of a peculiarly bloodthirsty tribe of Turkomans. These wild ruffians used to collect in bands within their own mountain fastnesses, and then suddenly to make a raid to the south, snapping up anything in the shape of caravans

that crossed their path. Their usual plan was to murder the old and to capture alive those active enough to make slaves. Rich merchants were favourite catches, for they not only afforded much booty, but often were ransomed by their friends for large sums. Raids sometimes stretched far into the interior of Persia, it being recorded that Ispahan, 300 miles distant from the Turkoman country, has several times been surprised by bands of these robbers. How times are changed! There is no more of this sort of thing since the Russians closed up to the Persian border, and I suppose it is the blood of my cattle-stealing forebears that makes me sympathise with the Turkomans in their loss of a strictly honourable, if slightly dishonest, livelihood.

Persians, however, viewed the matter somewhat differently. They never ventured into the dangerous zone without adequate escort. For this purpose two columns used to be maintained by the Persian Government, one on either side of the freebooting country. It was customary for pilgrims and caravans to collect at each side, and to start upon a prearranged date, guarded by the columns. In the middle the two columns met and changed caravans. These escorts usually consisted of about 100 infantry, 150 cavalry, and 1 gun. So late as 1872 the Seistan Boundary Commissioners, says Curzon, on their way back to Teheran, were escorted over the dreaded belt by 80 match-lockmen, 200 sowars, and a 4½-pounder gun. Travellers who have recorded their experiences are all unanimous in ascribing the most absurd terror to the pilgrims and merchants who had to pass this dreaded neighbourhood. Panics and false alarms were continuous, a whisper of the word Turkoman set everybody off shrieking upon the saints, while a puff of dust in the distance satisfied all concerned that the robbers were upon them and that they were dead men. It seems to be universally agreed that the Persian

is an irredeemable coward, and though I cannot say he is so from personal observation, I am equally unable to declare him valorous. In these days the Turkoman peril is entirely of the past, and the road is probably safer than Pall Mall. But its traditional terrors die hard, and Shaik Abdul adjured me to remain with the baggage while we were traversing this haunt of Shaitan, and so to arrange the marches that we should never have to travel after dark. He liked the company of the English double-barrel that Suliman carried handy, and he knew that whatever else I forgot, I was never without a handful of cartridges in my pocket.

How horrified he would have been if he had known how I wished and wished that a party of Turkomans might appear—a purely unselfish desire on my part, for I wanted them solely for the sake of my readers. It is one of the cherished ambitions of my life to fire a shot-gun at a galloping horseman, and to see the effect of the second barrel discharged at the rump of his astonished steed. I wonder how many redacteurs could do as I have done—ridden through a country where every bush hides the ghost of a moss-trooper—without conjuring up even the shadow of an adventure? When I think of the material at my disposal, the local colour in my paint-box, and the perfect picture of a Turkoman attack which the eye of my imagination sees, I remain astounded at my own moderation in not providing a circumstantial and bloody account of how we swiped a batch of brigands. Alas, for my journalistic instinct!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EN ROUTE TEHERAN.

But if the Turkomans no longer afford sport, the country which they used to haunt offers game of another kind. I was delighted to read in Curzon that a large beast like a red-deer was frequently to be seen close to the road. Curzon himself describes how he saw a numerous herd, and how he emptied his revolver into it—at a range of 300 yards. This instance of the lengths to which the Englishman will go in his passion for killing is only equalled by the case of the French officer who took a Maxim to the Pamirs and mowed down flocks of confiding *Ovis poli*. Hoping to see a herd of deer, I loaded my gun with number twos and turned Suliman into a gillie, which he did not like, for it entailed walking. We spent nearly a day crawling up to skylines, and then I gave it up, concluding that the revolver of my right honourable forerunner had scared them for ever.

Substituting sixes for the twos, I now devoted myself to smaller game, with much more satisfactory results. Certain parts of the road were alive with partridges, of which I shot three different varieties. Curzon says that he found them so tame that they let him get within a dozen yards. They wouldn't let me get nearer than 100 yards, and I calculated that they must have heard Curzon pumping bullets into the deer and remained shy ever since. Anyhow I found them very hard shooting.

Whenever I spotted them near the road I used to dismount and proceed with the gun as gingerly as possible. The wily little creatures always have sentinels out, and no sooner did I approach than they all began clucking and running. Then I would walk fast, and they would begin to hurry. Perhaps I next raised a shuffling trot, but they would respond with a whole-hearted scurry. Finally I used to make a sudden dash up, hoping to drop one as the covey rose. But as I seldom got within fifty yards I merely wasted cartridges. However, as I have before remarked, the cunning of the human animal, when seriously exercised, is always greater than that of the brute creation—running partridges are brutes without doubt—and I learnt to circumvent them.

It was observable that after a lot of running the covey rose together, but always settled not far away in open order. Walking them up, I found then that the members of the covey had lost touch, and that each bird got up separately. And so it became plain sailing. They were fearfully quick, but if I was very sharp, and happened to be facing in the right direction, and if the gun was properly aimed, and if I weren't too late, I generally found that a bird fell either to the first or second barrel. Once a curious thing happened. A bird rose, and was about to disappear over a low rising when I made a dash forward, tripped over a bush, and dug the gun deep into the soil. But just before I fell, my finger being wrongfully on the trigger, the gun went off and the charge hit the partridge. It took me just five minutes to clean the dirt out of the muzzles, and I had time to realise that if the gun had waited for a tenth of a second longer, it and I would both have gone to glory.

Pursuing the tactics described, I was descending a low hill when a partridge rose and dropped to the first barrel. But before the bird had fallen a hare as big as a sheep got up, and incontinently jumped right into the line of

fire of my second shot. Suliman, who saw this, shouted "Shabash!" and in his eagerness to collect the spoils let go both the horses, who thereupon commenced the return journey to Meshed. Fortunately Shaik Abdul was behind and collared the fugitives. When he came up Suliman explained what a marvel I was with the gun, but Shaik Abdul was horrified to think that I would demean myself by *walking* after game. Persians, said he, never shot partridges except from horseback. Thereupon I listened to directions, and presently set out convinced that what a Persian could do a Scot might try. I omitted to remember that the horse was the chief factor, and not the Caledonian, with disastrous results. Shaik Abdul said that when a Persian saw partridges he put his horse at a gallop and charged, firing at the birds as they rose. It did not seem more difficult than pig-sticking, except that the ground was abominably stony. So when soon afterwards I saw a bunch of little brown birds tittuping along the road in front I clapt my heels to Bucephalus and went after them. They took to the flanking slope, and so did my steed, whereat up got the covey. It was perhaps thirty-five yards, and a fair chance, so I loosed off. Heaven knows if I hit any, but I am quite certain that Bucephalus left me on the hillside and went three miles before he could be caught. No more mounted infantry work for me.

After the day's journeying we got out of the hilly region and found ourselves on a wide plain graced by the village of Maiomai, where I found quarters in the house of an aged and delightful Persian. He did all he could for my comfort, and then began to tell me about the Turkoman raids and other matters of local interest. Close to the village is a high mountain whereupon, he said, were two ancient castles, which his father had told him were visited by a Feringhi Sahib nearly a hundred years ago. Referring to Curzon, I found he had noted

that my namesake had climbed the mountain in 1834 and discovered two very old forts. It is something to belong to a sporting family, even if one has to write for a living. Curzon also notes that it was here that O'Donovan, about 1880, had his famous adventure with the Arab Hadjis, and barely escaped with his life. The very caravanserai where this was said to have happened was at the other side of the road, and I could see the room where O'Donovan took refuge from the infuriated fanatics. Strange to say, my host had never heard anything of this occurrence though he had lived within twenty yards of the spot for seventy years. But as O'Donovan is now in the place where all good Irish go, I will not add to his tortures by pursuing the subject.

A day later we arrived at the town of Shahrud, once one of the most important places in Persia, and still a considerable centre of trade. It is only about fifty miles from Astrabad, a town situated on a river that is navigable to the Caspian and connected by road with Gez, a seaport on the Caspian. Here there used to be several Russian traders, but I was told they had now all gone, leaving the trade in the hands of Armenians. Shahrud was a place of happy omen for me, for here my Burberry, posted after me by my friends at Meshed, was safely delivered. My horse, too, which had been lame throughout the journey since Nishapur, suddenly got well, and gave us a chance to push on and make up for lost time. In ten days we had covered 301 miles, for 240 of which the nag had been lame, so lame indeed for four days that I hardly rode him at all. There remained 258 miles to Teheran, and only six days to do it in. I asked Shaik Abdul how he fancied making up time, and he said Bismillah, and other things to the effect that the matter was in the hands of God. He and his mate were beginning to look fine-drawn, though the mules seemed all right, particularly the donkey, which continued to lead

the caravan like a machine afflicted with perpetual motion.

Hitherto I have said very little about the country through which we had been passing. There is indeed very little to say, for anything more utterly God-forsaken could scarcely be imagined. From Meshed to Teheran the road touches at all the most fertile places in the north-east of Persia, always excepting the southern littoral of the Caspian Sea. Throughout the total distance of 560 miles, if the plain of Nishapur is excepted, I believe we did not cross altogether more than ten miles of cultivated land. The route is one long record of stony, sandy, and salt desert, redeemed by the merest pin-points of cultivation. These little oases exist wherever water is available, and the great majority are no more than a few hundred yards square.

There is the greatest possible inducement to develop the resources adjoining the route connecting Teheran with Meshed, for it is traversed by great numbers of pilgrims, who, with their horses, must be provided with food and fodder. There is, besides, considerable trade passing along various stages of the road, particularly those between Shahrud and Teheran. Grain to supply the route is imported from other districts at a high cost for transport. Nothing is better assured than that this road would be exploited if it were possible to render it self-supporting. That so little of it is cultivated is due to the lack of natural water-supply, and to the immense expense of instituting irrigation. These two sentences contain the whole economic problem of Persia, and characterise in a few words the conditions that, with a few exceptions, rule the agricultural situation throughout the country.

The Persian system of irrigation is so curious that it deserves some description. Owing to the sandy soil, the great heat of the sun, and the evaporation which takes

Note the Donkey afflicted with perpetual motion—see page 440.

My Persian Caravan—see page 413.

place, water flowing on the surface of the ground quickly disappears, and unless the source of supply is very abundant, anything in the nature of a river quickly dries up. The snow-clad hills of the Elburz range give rise to several streams that flow southward for distances varying between twenty and fifty miles before they are absorbed in the desert. These little rivers are extensively employed to irrigate suitable land, but few places in Persia are so blessed. The great bulk of the irrigation throughout the country is conducted on the *kanats* system, common also to parts of Afghanistan and Baluchistan, where the name used is *karez*. So far as I am aware this laborious and expensive method of obtaining water is practised nowhere else except in Turkestan.

I have already written of the mountainous character of the north of Persia and the impossibility of getting away from long ridges that alternate with wide sandy plains. It is only in the neighbourhood of such ridges that cultivation is possible, and the height of the ridges governs the distance at which it is possible to reclaim land. If the hills are small the catchment area, in a country where humidity is extremely low, will not furnish enough water to travel beyond the foothills, whereas if the mountains are high and snow-clad, probably the whole of the adjacent plain may be cultivated by means of the comparatively plentiful supply of water. Thus Teheran overlooked by the Elburz mountains, Nishapur by the range which caused me such a fright, and Kuchan by the mountains forming the northern boundary, are all placed in regions where the supply is abnormal, and where extensive cultivation is possible. But such environment is rare in Persia, and the majority of villages nestle close to the mountains, where the precious water is caught before it has time to be dispersed in the sand or evaporated by the dry air. But even at the very opening of the valleys and ravines that

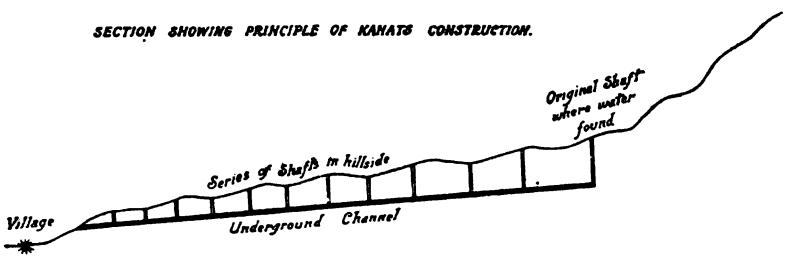
run up into the heart of mountains the superficial water is extremely limited, and the inhabitants are forced to seek subterranean sources if they are to maintain a regular supply.

And so there has arisen in Persia the profession of the *mukanni-bashi*, or water-finder. By a process of divination, which nobody has yet been able to understand, this individual can point out where water may be obtained underground. The spot is always uphill from the land or village which seeks to augment its supplies, and, having been selected with much ceremony, a shaft is duly sunk until the water is encountered. There is now the problem of conveying the water from a depth of possibly 300 or 400 feet to the village, which may be four or five miles distant. The *kanats* engineer makes an underground channel through which the water flows until it reaches the surface, the construction of this subterranean aqueduct requiring great labour and much dynamic instinct.

Knowing the depth at which water appears in his experimental shaft, the engineer walks downhill towards the objective, and proceeding perhaps for three miles, arrives at a point which he believes level with the water in the shaft. How he can decide this without instruments is a mystery, but it remains that a man skilled at the work seldom makes a mistake. He now begins digging a trench from a point considerably below the level of the water in the far-distant shaft. It is necessary, of course, to give the water a slope or it will not flow, and it is also necessary to make this slope as slight as possible in order to restrict the length of underground work. Trenching towards the distant experimental shaft, a time comes when the digger finds it more economical to burrow underground than to make an open ditch. And shortly after he finds that the labour of hauling

earth out of a long horizontal passage is less profitable than hoisting it out of a perpendicular shaft. And so, simultaneously with the subterranean channel, he builds a series of vertical shafts which enable him to dispose of the loose earth that accumulates below ground, and which will afterwards give him periodic access for repairs. The distance between shafts is decided by the question of the disposal of the loose earth. If the channel is close to the surface it pays to make frequent vertical openings, but if deep down the intervals lengthen out to as much as 100 yards.

As a rule each mile of channel is tapped by about sixty vertical shafts, representing an immense initial labour,



besides much annual attention. In any discussion dealing with the economic potentialities of Persia the *kanats* system must be taken into consideration, for, after all, it is the main source of water supply in the country, and is not to be superseded by scientific methods, for reasons which I shall adduce hereafter. The expense of constructing *kanats* is large, and can only be borne by wealthy men or corporations. Usually the builder does not require all the water himself, and then he sells it to his neighbours at a high price. All the towns that I have hitherto visited in Persia obtain their water in this manner, and Teheran itself, I believe, has no other source of supply but forty of these *kanats*, which tap the slopes

of the mountains distant about three miles. The essential nature of this system could hardly be more effectually indicated than by quoting the case of Teheran. Although the city is situated literally under the shadow of a mountain-ridge that is 11,000 feet above sea-level, and 7000 above the town, it is dependent upon *kanats* for its water, for the streams that flow from the adjacent mountains are so small that they are absorbed for irrigation purposes immediately they leave the hillsides.

Then the *kanats* have other beside utilitarian uses. Where one of these subterranean channels has been constructed we find a long row of rubbish-heaps, in the centre of which are the tops of the shafts leading down below. They are just like the mouths of miniature volcanoes, while the inside of the shaft itself is often cracked and broken. In the niches and interstices pigeons find a warm roosting-place by night and a cool resting-place by day. Large flocks of blue-rocks utilise *kanats* in this manner, particularly those that are disused or have become wide through the action of time and weather. And so the sportsman is given an opportunity. With his gun he walks along a row of *kanats*, accompanied by any individual with a penchant for sport and an aptitude for throwing stones. The stone-thrower keeps in rear and to one side, and as each mound is approached he throws into the air a stone, which, after describing a graceful parabola, falls into the hollow of the rubbish-heap, and from there into the shaft, where it may be heard bumping backwards and forwards until, with a deep boom, it plunges into the water far below. These noises agitate so greatly any pigeons that may be at home that they come fluttering out by ones and twos, to the extreme delight of the man with the gun, and to the triumph of the stone-thrower, who doubts not that his is the skill that fills the bag.

Between Shahrud and Teheran there is not much to describe, and indeed the pace at which we now began to travel left neither time nor energy for much observation. The classic towns of Damghan and Semnan left behind, there are the famous Caspian Gates—the Caspiæ Pylæ of Pliny—to be negotiated. Curzon, in a few of those trenchant sentences that caused him to be so revered in Indian Secretariats, wipes the floor with everybody who has ever tried to prove that the unimposing defile which one rides through on the road to Teheran is the place through which Alexander the Great chased Darius the King. I am inclined to agree with Curzon, and certainly the defile does not correspond with Pliny's description. At the same time Curzon omits to take into consideration the likelihood that Pliny was a liar, and that having his living to gain by writing, he probably exaggerated the scenery of the pass, like any redacteur of present times might do. But having passed through the Gates, whether they be the Caspian or some other, one emerges upon a plain, from whence is visible a sight for sore eyes. There is at one's feet the broad yellow plain, unmitigated desert, bounded by a high, arid, and utterly desolate-looking ridge of drab-coloured rock. And peeping over this ridge is the top of Demavend—pure white, perfectly shaped, almost ethereal against the background of deep-blue sky. Dwelling of the Genii, resting-place of Noah's Ark, home of Rustam, the national hero, site of treasure-filled caverns guarded by snakes, are attributed by Persians to their greatest mountain, one of the most graceful in the world. Over 18,000 feet high, it floats serenely above the neighbouring hills, perpetually clothed in snow, and for ever looking down upon the capital of the Centre of the Universe. Indeed loyal Persians have been heard to declare, in the Presence, that Demavend was placed there by the Almighty as a sign that the Shah-in-Shah, the

King of Kings, was the greatest monarch in the world.

From a village near Demavend it is only fifty-one miles to Teheran, and this distance we essayed to cover in ten hours by starting at 2 A.M., without breakfast. At daylight Suliman and I stopped for a cup of tea and a crust of bread, leaving the donkey to make the running in its usual headlong fashion. By twelve o'clock we entered Teheran, and I would ask the sporting reader to ponder over this performance. We begin our journey on hired nags, and do 291 miles in ten days, one of the horses being dead lame for nearly 200 miles of that distance. We then began to put *on* speed, and covered the remaining 268 miles in a shade over six days, whereof the last 51 miles was done in ten hours. Altogether we covered 559 miles in sixteen days two hours. Strictly speaking, only the horses did this, but the two mules and the donkey were only two hours behind us, and for practical purposes the whole caravan may be deemed to have done the same thing. All the animals pulled up fit and well, a little tucked-up, of course, but their coats were good, back and quarters showed no loss of muscle, and I have no hesitation in saying that the whole lot were quite capable of going farther. My own nag was rather leg-weary, but when his lameness is remembered the marvel is that he had not broken down. The animals were rather better than the usual ones available for caravan-work, but it remains that they were beasts offered for hire, and which were kept for that purpose by their owner. In my opinion the performance described is remarkable, proving notable stamina on the part of the Persian horse, mule, and donkey, and highly creditable horsemastership on the part of the attendants.

I have now been from end to end of Asia, and ridden

the horses of practically every country in it. The more one sees of Asiatic horse management, and the more one realises what the Asiatic can get out of under-sized, three-cornered, and often weedy animals, the more convinced one becomes that we, who think we know all there is to know about horsemastership, have still something to learn. It is undeniable that English breeding has evolved thoroughbreds for racing, half-breds for hunting and other purposes, and heavy horses for draught, that for shape, make, and power are without rival in the world. But it is equally undeniable that in Asia there are horses equal to tasks that would puzzle our fine animals, but whose appearance would excite contempt in the eyes of a cat's-meat man. The animals we rode from Meshed to Teheran would not fetch five pounds apiece in England, and no self-respecting owner would have them as a gift. Yet I do not fancy there are many owners who would like to back their valuable property to do what these ragged Persians did. In England we want horses to concentrate their energies into brief efforts, and for racing, polo, and suchlike our system of training is excellent. But with due deference to cavalrymen, I would ask if the methods which are suitable for sporting purposes, and which to a great extent are employed in military training, are the methods most likely to turn out a horse fit to take the field in a campaign. Within the last few years I have seen so many of the canons of English horsemastership utterly ignored, and at the same time such fine work achieved, that I begin to think there are some things about horses that we don't know. It is, for instance, a dogma in English stables that feed should be little and often; but throughout Asia, so far as I am aware, it is a bellyful and seldom. In Manchuria the Japanese fed night and morning only,

and their cavalry did wonderful work despite wofully inferior mounting. Little and often must be right for the horse that is to gallop a mile at top speed, but may not the other be the best treatment for animals that are wanted to do forty miles a day for an indefinite period?

Teheran is a much written about city. I expected to find myself in a blend of Paris, Cairo, and Calcutta, wherein the colour of the Orient enriched the architecture of the Occident, and where the quaint and curious structures of the East were dignified by the wide streets and broad avenues of the West. I looked for dashing equipages rolling over beautiful tree-beskirted roads, for rows of handsome shops, for palatial hotels, for noble palaces redolent of the glory of the King of Kings and of the beauteous ladies who adorn his household. I had been told of the advantages of living here and living there, but that all things considered I had better patronise the English Hotel, where the expense might be greater but where the style was superior. With my six months' beard, my stained and barbarous garments and sun-reddened face, I was shy of entering a civilised town and meeting correctly-clad and delicate-nosed countrymen. So I hoped for speedy and unostentatious arrival at the chosen hotel, and prompt correction of the unbathed condition that had been imposed by our sixteen days of furious progress through the deserts of Persia.

I bade Suliman ride in front and inquire the way. We wandered through mean and narrow streets flanked by native buildings of unattractive appearance, and semi-foreign constructions that would have discredited Whitechapel. There had been rain a few days before, and the streets were filthily dirty. The sky was overcast, and loomed darkly over the general squalidness. We seemed to have spent an hour marching along an

endless succession of unclean lanes when we suddenly entered upon an open space which I recognised without difficulty as being the Trafalgar Square of Teheran; otherwise the Tup Meidan, or Gun Square. This curious place is surrounded on three sides by low stucco buildings painted yellow, blue, and red, colours that looked inexpressibly garish and bizarre on so dull a day. The longer sides of the square are the artillery barracks, the western a magazine, and the eastern a tolerably fine building inhabited by the Imperial Bank of Persia. The centre is occupied by a small lake surrounded by an iron fence, and from the four corners of the enclosures project the iron muzzles of four huge old-fashioned cannon.

A gaudy gateway on one side of the square leads toward the royal palaces, while another on the opposite side is the beginning of the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, a thoroughfare I still hoped would fulfil the mental picture I had formed of the glories of Teheran. But I quickly realised that my hopes of the Persian metropolis were already blasted, and that preconceived notions must undergo a painful revolution. The Boulevard turned out to be a narrow road with ragged, leafless trees sparsely placed along the sides. Mean European shops alternated with dirty native stalls, and here and there a two-storeyed building in European style suggested bad architecture and inferior workmanship. Over a low door I happened by chance to read the word "Hotel," and this, Suliman informed me, was the object of our search, and the goal of sixteen weary days' expectation. Down a passage I found a courtyard, with a cottage sort of building at the end and two or three rooms down the sides. It was fourth-class accommodation at the very best, and I was not sorry, perhaps, to hear that it was fully occupied. I had written to our Legation a fortnight previously asking that my

correspondence might be sent here to meet me. But there were no letters waiting me, and I afterwards found that owing to the idiosyncracies of the postal service my communication to the Legation had never arrived. I now tried the Hôtel d'Europe, an equally miserable hostelry, only to find that it too was full up.

Suliman and I then mounted again and set our tired nags marching in the direction of the Legation, where I hoped to obtain my correspondence, and advice in regard to a place to lay my head. We had been in the saddle since two in the morning. It was now two in the afternoon, and we were tired and hungry beyond the power of bad words in any language to express. Advancing along the Boulevard we found a slight improvement in its appearance, for trees were more regularly placed, and an occasional building of comparatively imposing style flanked the way. Wonderful uniforms lounging at gates, foreign flags fluttering aloft, and pacing sentries, warned us that we were passing the august residences of the personages who represented the Powers of Europe. Hôtel de France distinguished one new building that seemed not yet out of the hands of workmen. One of the tribe of boys following us said this was a hotel, and a black-eyed, very stout, but handsome Frenchwoman standing at the door gave me a charming smile and said a chamber was available if Monsieur would honour her house. Monsieur accepted the offer in his best Parisian, and ordered a huge meal to be ready against his return with the eagerly desired correspondence.

We continued our disreputable progress along the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, and presently arrived at a high wall behind which appeared a forest of trees. Farther on was a gate surmounted by the emblazoned arms of his Britannic Majesty, above which waved the Union Jack. We marched in, the guard turned out,

and lo! it was British soil once more. With renewed vigour and swelling chests Suliman and I guided our horses towards the Chancery, knowing that henceforth our troubles were ended. Suliman is by way of being an Afghan subject, his father having been killed in the Hazara rebellion, and as such he claims the protection of the British flag in foreign lands; and gets it, as do all Afghans.

A Persian chuprassi at the Chancery said it was Sunday, and that all the offices were closed. I had long lost all count of days or dates, and had completely forgotten that there was one day in the seven that was different from the others — such is the effect of travel in heathen lands. Suliman's twenty words of Hindustani were all connected with the kitchen and kindred subjects, and when I entered upon an abstract discussion in regard to the name and rank of the various officials of the Legation a deadlock quickly ensued. I wanted to find out in which of several houses in the grounds the most *chota* of the Sahibs resided. If I went to this Sahib or that Sahib, I might find myself in the presence of a senior personage who would resent being disturbed on a Sunday, and who would be furious when he discovered that I only wanted my cursed correspondence. The absolute junior was the only one to approach, and he would have to be delicately handled in view of the fearful impression that my personal appearance must make.

When I was beginning to get heated by the futility of endeavouring to find out anything, a man in riding kit came round a corner and asked if he could do anything for me. He looked very pleasant, and had none of the inscrutable air that novel-reading had led me to believe was characteristic of the diplomat. So I just confided in him, and said I was damned tired, and wanted my letters before I returned to my hotel.

Then he suddenly accused me of being the redacteur from India, and began shaking hands with me. At that moment a lady rode round the corner, and I shook hands with her and accepted an invitation to lunch and another to dinner, and told them what a nasty journey it was from Meshed, and that I was going to stop at the fat Frenchwoman's. Then a younger man appeared, and the first one handed me over to him, and we went off to get the letters. Then I learned—what I had already suspected—that my first friend was the Minister himself. I had tea and dinner in the Legation grounds, and thereafter lunch, tea, and dinner with somebody or other every day I was in Teheran. The Foreign Office is so mangy in its housing arrangements for the Legation staff that there isn't a member of it, from the Minister downwards, that can give a visitor a bed for the night. But they can all provide the passing guest with the wherewithal upon which to exercise a knife and fork, and henceforward I shall always believe that a taste for ham boiled in champagne is entirely natural in a country where there are no pigs, and that a joyous hospitality is not at all incompatible with abundant ability to outwit the wily Rooshian.

To those who would know something of the treasures of Teheran I would suggest the pages of Curzon, where buildings, pictures, jewels, and other valuables associated with Persian royalty, are described in the complete and comprehensive manner characteristic of everything accomplished by the late Viceroy of India. Numerous writers have estimated the value of the Persian Crown Jewels, the highest being that of Lord Pollington, who in 1865 thought them worth forty to fifty millions sterling. Curzon wisely refrains from hazarding a valuation, and since his time it is quite certain that much of the treasures have been sold to support the

extravagance of the Shah. It is often said in Teheran that of those things which could not decently be disposed of, many have been imitated by European jewellers, and the originals sold. That Persians themselves are ready to say so is suggestive of the degree of respect in which the Shah is held by his subjects, and the faith which they have in the honesty of their rulers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ECONOMIC POSITION.

OPTIMISM is the gift of the gods. But when the gods make people optimistic about the economic future of Persia they surely do it in sport. Before crossing the border of Iran, I possessed just that irreducible minimum of information which so well qualifies the hot-footed traveller to enlarge upon the conditions and to dilate upon the destinies of the country he is visiting. I had made up my mind that the regeneration and re-enrichment of Persia was entirely a question of railways; that progress and political evolution might make giant strides if only British capital and British commercial energy might be induced to flow in the desired direction.

And now, having been two months in Persia, having travelled a thousand miles in it, and having worn to shadows by my questioning all the people I met in the country, I am ready to wager that there will never be railways in Persia, and that it would profit a man more to cast his money into an Irish bog than to invest it in Persia.

The area of the Indian Empire is some 1,700,000 square miles and the population about 300,000,000, giving a density of 180 people to the square mile. The area of Persia is nearly half as much as that of the Indian Empire, but the population is only equal to a fortieth of the population of India, giving a density

of only 10 to the square mile. In other words, India is eighteen times as densely populated as Persia, and may fairly be considered, area for area, as being eighteen times as rich as the smaller country. But in fact the natural resources of Persia bear a much smaller proportion to those of India than even these figures suggest. The fertility of the soil is the ultimate factor which determines the wealth of a country—leaving mineral treasures out of consideration. And fertility is a condition almost entirely dependent upon the degree of moisture in the soil, whether attained by rainfall, irrigation, or periodic floods. Egypt, devoid of a rainfall, is rendered fertile through the good offices of the Nile by the summer rains of Central Africa; the Punjab, with a moderate rainfall, is irrigated by the melted snow from the Himalayas; while Bengal is one vast garden consequent on the heavy and regular rain which falls upon the land and loads the atmosphere with humidity.

All of these considerations are wanting in Persia. Only one mountain in this enormous country is capped with snow throughout the year. The summer sun beats in vain on the barren tops of the hundreds of ranges that corrugate its vast tableland. The winter snows in the north deposit a mere film that disappears early in spring. Nowhere in Persia is there a rainfall exceeding eight or nine inches per annum—with trifling exceptions to be mentioned hereafter. There is only one river in the country worthy the name. Indeed, Persia suffers from permanent drought, and humidity, rainfall, and rivers are things materially impossible under present climatic conditions. The gradual desiccation which is so marked throughout Central Asia extends in fact to Persia.

Topographically Persia is not difficult to understand. The whole of the interior is a tableland ranging from 7000 feet above sea-level to 4000, with depressions from the general level in the centres of the two great salt

deserts. On the northern frontier stretches a series of mountain-ranges, in which Demavend, 18,500 feet, is the highest, and in which are many peaks measuring 10,000 feet. In the south Persia is bounded by the sea, but within a few miles of the coast are a series of mountain-ranges which stretch from Mesopotamia in the west to Baluchistan in the east. The western frontier is situated in the mountainous region which is partly Turkish and partly Persian. In the east the Persian tableland merges into the highlands of Afghanistan and Baluchistan. What is important to realise is that the interior of Persia cannot at any point be reached except by crossing the girdle of mountains that completely encircles it.

Few except students of the subject realise the vast size of Persia. It has an extreme length of 1200 miles and an extreme breadth of 800, and exceeds in area that part of India south of a line drawn between Karachi and Calcutta. To estimate the economic possibilities of so huge a country it is essential clearly to understand where are the centres of population, and what is the nature of the communications that afford outlet to productions and inlet to importations.

It was generally accepted twenty-five years ago that the population of Persia was 7½ millions. Since then some authorities believe that the numbers have gone up to 9 millions, some believe the figures to have remained stationary, while I have met others who have seen a great deal of the country and who declare that the population is decreasing. On my own account, I can say no more than that from the point where I crossed the frontier to Kazvin, a distance of over 900 miles, there was much in the shape of deserted houses, neglected fields, and ruined *kanats* to suggest that within quite recent years there had been a falling off in population. But while there is the greatest difficulty in

arriving at accurate numbers, there is no doubt as to the regions in which dwell the bulk of the population; and basing my calculations on a total of 7½ millions, I venture the following estimates with some confidence in their general accuracy:—

3,750,000	in the northern provinces closely adjoining Russian territory and the Caspian Sea.
1,000,000	in Khorasan practically concentrated in one narrow strip in the extreme north-east corner.
400,000	in Kerman, Seistan, and Baluchistan in the south-east corner.
500,000	on the western frontier.
100,000	on the southern coasts.
5,750,000	

This total leaves something under 2,000,000 to be distributed throughout the entire slopes of the mountainous system running south-east, and including the well-known towns of Kerman, Yezd, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Hamadan.

The outstanding feature of this analysis is that it shows half the population of Persia to live within easy touch of Russian territory, and occupying a region the nearest point of which is over 700 miles from a port on the Persian Gulf. Then the populous part of Khorasan is only distant from the Russian railway 170 miles, while from Bunder Abbas on the Gulf is 1000 miles, and from Quetta also 1000 miles. The Transcaspian railway running along the northern frontier of Khorasan, the branch line from the Caucasus system to the Persian border at Julfa, and the southern shores of the Caspian, thus give Russia facilities for dealing with more than half the population of Persia, which British trade can never hope to attain unless the 700 miles from the Gulf is bridged by railway communication.

It is quite clear that a railway from the Gulf, traversing that 700 miles from Bushire, or any other convenient point, to Teheran, would be tapping a belt of country inhabited by less than 2,000,000 people. Moreover, the breadth of that belt is something like 200 miles, and the alignment of the railway, however cunningly devised, could not possibly touch at more than a fraction of the inhabited places. This is indeed an immense region, in reality populated in the sparsest manner, where centres are so widely separated that to bring them all into touch would be almost impracticable. The question naturally arises—would it pay to build a railway extending over so great a distance and tapping such widely scattered areas of cultivation? The railway would cost more to build per mile than probably any equally long railway in any part of the world. The very first section would include passes of over 7000 feet and engineering difficulties of the first magnitude. At present there is no fuel in Persia, though coal would doubtless be found, and there are indications of naphtha in places. Every sleeper would have to be imported by sea, and, of course, every yard of rail, all the rolling stock, and material of every kind. From an economic point of view, it seems clear enough that even if Persia were a country of unlimited possibilities the construction of such a railway would be looked upon as a very doubtful enterprise. Probably capitalists would hold aloof until in the interior there was found indications of great mineral wealth, promise of remarkable industrial development, or surety of large supplies of raw product for which there was a demand in other parts of the world.

But of all these things there is no immediate prospect whatever. With the exception of carpets, exported to the value of some £200,000 annually, there are no manufactures in Persia. No mineral deposits in workable quantities have been found—a syndicate which

some years ago obtained a monopoly of the mining rights of the entire country spent £120,000 and then retired in utter disgust. There are no raw products except cotton, of which about 2500 tons go from the region under discussion to Russia, attracted thereto by very heavy concessions of duty. The truth is that Persia is an agricultural country, and that it grows just sufficient food to support the population, and that the surplus productions are so small that they would be almost worthless to a railway as a means of earning a dividend.

The ordinary conception of the function of a railway is that it should cause expansion in all those matters in which, as I am endeavouring to show, Persia is at present wholly deficient. When railways crossed the prairies of America and Canada there was nothing there but grass. But the soil was golden, and only needed the plough and human hands to extract its wealth. Every mile of railway meant 100 square miles of waving corn, besides which in the Far West was the richest mining region in the world. Railways made America, because Nature had already provided everything but a means of transport. The grand difference between Persia and such countries is that Nature provides nothing in the former, and that everything grown in it is wrested from the soil by a maximum of labour. If the energy required for the production of 100 square miles of wheat field in America could be calculated, it would be found that to produce a similar area in Persia would require 10,000 per cent more energy. In Persia you must seek out a spot free of saline deposit and clear it of stones; you must construct at great labour and great expense one of those canals which I have described; the sandy soil must be flooded for a year or two before it becomes productive, and then it must be constantly irrigated whilst the crop is growing.

A most instructive document on the economic condi-

tions of Persia is the Report of the British Indian Commercial Mission which, under the presidency of Mr Gleadowe-Newcomen, recently visited the country. Mr Newcomen makes many shrewd observations, and his view of the existing situation is open to very little argument. But in regard to the possibilities I am very far from agreeing with him, particularly in regard to irrigation, which Mr Newcomen very properly observes must be the key to any material expansion of the resources of Persia. Mr Newcomen, having covered 2000 miles during the progress of the Mission, deliberately states as his opinion that the proportion of cultivated and cultivable land to wilderness and desert is steadily shrinking. He says—

"Irrigation is, as I have said, Persia's greatest need. Without it she becomes a desert. As it is, every village irrigates, with painful toil, its few fields, and draws its supply of life-giving water at the cost of infinite trouble from the distant snow-clad mountains, by means of underground channels. . . . Still, every day the desert encroaches upon the oases of fertile land. Every year sees an extension of the arid zone and an addition to the dreary number of ruined and abandoned villages and *kanats*. Every year the rivers and streams that come down from the naked hills seem either to run themselves out or retire deeper underground. That their desiccation has been progressive for many ages is evidenced by the remains of dead villages and the lines of half-obliterated *kanats* wells, to be found in the interior deserts. . . ."

If, then, the water-supply is failing, how can there be an increase of irrigation? Unquestionably a more scientific system which would make greater use of the available supply might be adopted. But that could only be done by the employment of great capital, of which Persia is completely devoid. And if the water-supply is so meagre, would it not render all schemes so expensive that the results would not yield an adequate return?

To expect a material enlargement of the cultivated area under the present system is out of the question, for the expense and labour required to maintain *kanats* is already about as much as any community can bear.

Such being the conditions, one may well ask, What could railways do for Persia? If railways could be dumped down philanthropically, like Free Libraries, no doubt there would be an immediate and general improvement in commerce. But if they have to be constructed on commercial principles, then Persia must do without them. In discussing the project for a railway from Bunder Abbas, Mr Newcomen sums up the situation in a sentence which must appeal to everybody who knows anything of Persia.

". . . It would not pay to build this or any other line in Persia under present conditions, and never will pay unless the production, population, and trade of the country are at least doubled."

If there can be no increase of cultivation there can be no increase of population, and if neither of these can be augmented it is quite certain that trade cannot expand. And so the conditions premised by Mr Newcomen are most unlikely ever to ensue. One short line may be built in the near future, and it is the only one that could really pay. But it is in the north and would connect with the Russian system, entirely to the benefit of Russian trade—a prospect that, naturally, does not excite enthusiasm in the breast of a British subject.

Certain improvements, of course, are possible—such as better government, which would give greater security from official exaction, and permit enterprise where it is now stifled. The discovery of extensive mineral wealth in paying quantities would hardly do much for the country unless found in conjunction with coal and within close distance of the Russian railways in the

Persia imports iron, copper, brass, nickel, &c., to the value of about £200,000 per annum, besides manufactured goods in large quantity. This does not say much for the quality of the mines or the prospects of scientific mining.

Persia boasts one railway and one tramway. The first consists of a single line running from Teheran to a tomb six miles outside the city, with a small extension to some quarries. Even this miniature adventure has brought disaster to its projectors. The original concessionaire formed a syndicate which despatched rails and other material to the Gulf—where they are said still to lie. The syndicate having spent its money, sold the concession to a Belgian company, which started with a flourish of trumpets, building a station and offices worthy of the terminus of the greater scheme for extension to the Gulf which the smaller was supposed to inaugurate. The rails were imported *vid* the Caspian, their transport from which cost no less than £2 per rail, although they were only of the trifling weight necessary to a 30-inch gauge. Every scrap of the material had to be similarly transported, and even the sleepers had to be brought from a distant part of Persia at immense cost. Hopelessly over-capitalised, this tiny railway was a failure from the beginning. The tramway, which is laid in the streets of Teheran, suffered severely from the same complaint, and both companies have lost their money. These two concerns have now been taken over by a Russian company for a mere song, and they are supposed to pay their way on a very minor scale.

It has been generally realised, of course, in recent years that railway enterprise cannot well be profitable under existing conditions. So now road construction came into vogue, and it will be interesting to see what success has attended the only decent highway in Persia, financed and engineered by a Russian company. Having been

open for, I think, ten years, it ought by this time to be paying its way, particularly as it was designed by Russia to encourage and promote Russian trade between the Caspian Sea and the capital of Persia. Towards that end Russia outwitted the British Government in the matter of the new tariff, which gives Russian great advantages over British trade. She further inaugurated a system of bounties and drawbacks to stimulate exports to Persia, and established a State-aided bank which gives facilities in connection with the import of Russian goods that set all business principles at defiance. But in spite of these endeavours the financial position of the Road Company is deplorable, as the following figures for 1905, officially published, show :—

Capital of the company . . .	£1,197,339
Acquiring concession and purchasing part of road already constructed by Persians .	650,208
Total receipts for 1905 . . .	27,723
Total expenses for 1905 . . .	24,608
Net profits for 1905 . . .	3,115

A dividend of ¼ per cent on a capital of over a million pounds must make the shareholders think hardly of Persia. Of course, the road is hopelessly over-capitalised, a result due to the excessive greed of the Persian Government in selling the concession, and to the magnificent ideas of Russians when handling public money. But it is very curious that Russian efforts to increase trade have not been more successful, and I am assured that there has been little perceptible increase in the bulk of goods passing over this route since twenty years ago, when it was no more than a mule-track over the mountains.

Some years ago a Belgian company started manufacturing beet-root sugar at Teheran, having imported the very finest machinery and built works that in their

fittings and appointments were regarded as equal to anything in Europe. In a month or two they had to shut up, and the company went into liquidation. Another company instituted a glass factory, which ran for a few months and then went bankrupt. A very large Oriental firm established in London and Bombay opened branches in Persia not long ago, in the hope of doing lucrative business. They lost £20,000 in three years and then retired, having experienced sadness and learnt wisdom during their brief essay. A big firm from Lancashire went bankrupt a few years ago, owing to their losses in Persia. There are still, I think, two British firms engaged in business in Southern Persia, and their struggles against adversity are heroic to behold. An Indian syndicate sent representatives to Meshed not long ago, and they have retired after losing money. There are many other enterprises that might be mentioned, all of which have experienced disaster in some degree or another, there being no single project backed by Europeans that can be pointed to as having been a financial success.

I now come to the one institution that has avoided the rocks and obtained a measure of success which can be gauged by the fact that its £10 shares, after eighteen years of business, are now worth £6 a-piece, although at one time they had dropped as low as £4, 10s. The Imperial Bank of Persia was founded in 1889, having bought out for £20,000 the New Oriental Banking Corporation recently established. Under a concession from the Persian Government, which included various other privileges besides those relating to banking, and with a British Charter, it made a promising start, and is now doing a large but guarded business. Partly owing to the fall in the value of silver and partly owing to losses, it has been compelled to write down its capital from £1,000,000 to £650,000, thereby losing £350,000. However, owing to the consummate handling

of the business by the manager, the Bank is now doing well, and the shares are rising, although they are still a long way below par. It ought to be mentioned here that Baron de Reuter was principally concerned in obtaining the concession for the Bank, and that under its terms he obtained a refund of the caution-money of £40,000 confiscated sixteen years previously.

The Russian Bank, which for some years has done a flourishing trade in the north of Persia, has had some interesting experiences. This institution is hardly a commercial venture, for the Russian Government is behind it, and its policy is dictated by the Ministry of Finance. Established for the furtherance of Russian trade, it has offered to merchants terms for the import of goods that amount to nothing less than a bounty. At its offices samples of Russian manufacture were exhibited for the benefit of Persian buyers. Traders were tempted to give orders by favourable arrangements, which included long credit. The result has been an unnatural import trade, which has flooded the market with certain classes of goods that are now heavily overstocked. Incidentally, British trade in similar articles in the north of Persia has been crushed out of existence. But at what cost? In order to do business, the Russian Bank frequently dealt with men of straw, who had everything to gain and nothing to lose. Local firms of good standing, too, were led into over-trading, with the consequence that their capital is now represented by unsaleable goods. There now exists in Teheran a deadlock, whereby the Russian Bank is owed large sums which the merchants cannot pay, because they cannot sell their goods. It is useless for the Bank to try to enforce payment, for not only does Persian law give no assistance to a creditor, but the debtors have actually combined to resist the Bank in case it takes steps against any individual debtor. The Bank has practically ceased its endeavours to stimulate

Russian trade, and is now engaged in counting up its losses. I was told in Teheran that there are outstanding debts totalling £300,000, of which the Bank will be lucky if it ultimately recovers 40 per cent. There have been frequent complaints that the British bank does not encourage British trade as it might. But it is the function of a bank to finance legitimate exchange of commodities, and not to throw money to the winds. Some of the recent expansion in Russian trade returns has been due to the unnatural stimulus administered to the Teheran market. British trade has received no such adventitious aid, and what there is of it is sound and fairly profitable. In such regions as offer opportunity for British goods to compete there need be no fear of a falling-off in demand; on the contrary, now that the Russians have realised the difficulty of artificially promoting a demand for their goods, there is a prospect that British manufactures will to some extent reassert their position.

Against this record of misfortune there is nothing to set on the other side; and though these failures are partly to be attributed to the faithlessness of the Persians, and in some degree to the business ineptitude of promoters, it is obvious that there must be behind it all fundamental causes which militate against commercial success. What these causes are would seem clear enough, and it is reasonable to assume that if the conditions ruling the economic situation in Persia had been completely realised, much disaster might have been avoided. Earlier in this chapter I endeavoured to show why the country was so unpromising to commercial venture, and it is not necessary to do more than repeat that where agricultural surpluses are so small there cannot be much money to spend on imported goods; and that when populated areas are so widely separated, and so difficult of access, much of the profits attaching to the exchange of commodities is absorbed in the cost of trans-

port. In fact, there are strict limits to the capacity to produce, and consequently on the capacity to purchase; and the conditions of the country are such that material expansion is out of the question.

This, of course, is now pretty well recognised by most people who know Persia, though it is astonishing to encounter well-informed individuals who are enthusiastic about various enterprises that at once strike the newcomer as fundamentally unsound. The Persians themselves are utterly childish in their ideas regarding the development of their country. A bank with a capital of £10,000,000, or a railway a thousand miles long, are pets of their imagination which no amount of education or travel in Europe can discomfit. They journey by rail from Baku to Paris, and think it ought to be possible to do the same in Persia. They do not seem to grasp that inalienably bound up with railways are industrial centres and unceasing stretches of cultivated ground. There are no industrial centres in Persia in this sense, and a thousand miles of travel in it means ninety-eight of sheer desert to every two of cultivation. A young man in Teheran, who spoke almost perfect English, and who had lived for years in Europe and America, was most enthusiastic over the new National Bank of which we have recently heard so much. The capital would only be five millions at first, but later on it would be raised to ten millions. I pointed out that we had no bank in England with such a capital. He stuck to his many-millioned institution, and I tried to argue him out of his idea by the remark that there was surely something anomalous in a bank with a capital several times as great as the annual revenue of the country in which it existed. But his beautiful astrakhan hat, his frock-coat, his carefully cut London trousers, and his pointed patent-leather boots, all covered unbounded ambition, and a want of the sense of proportion that would qualify him for a minor poetship, or a tub in the talking part of Hyde Park.

scientific qualifications of their own countrymen, and if one is to believe all that was current in Teheran the strife waxed hot and furious. Meanwhile the Shah was dying; but this was a matter of minor importance compared to the possibility of one Minister obtaining a diplomatic triumph over the dead bodies of the other Ministers. Finally, the names of all the countries interested were put in a hat, and it was decided that the much-needed doctor should be imported from that country which was lucky enough to be drawn.

A little boy was employed to pick out one of the pieces of paper, and it is an injustice to the rest of Europe, an instance of Divine partiality, and a triumph for the House of Hohenzollern, that the little boy selected—Germany. The doctor was cabled for, and it was agreed to pay him £1000 per week for so many weeks, plus all expenses. The German Legation showed a fine commercial instinct in the negotiations regarding remuneration, and the doctor was not allowed to pack his bag until half the price was deposited.

It was when the condition of the Shah was realised to be so serious that the expediency of having the Vali Ahd at the capital became apparent. He was accordingly advised of the situation, and requested to travel from his residence at Tabriz with all speed. At this juncture, when it was generally thought that there might be trouble if the Shah died before the arrival of the Vali Ahd, the two Powers most interested—Russia and ourselves—were in complete unanimity regarding the desirability of giving all possible moral support to the Persian Government. It was publicly understood in Teheran that both Ministers had pledged themselves to abstain from all interference with the course of events, and that neither would take any steps to gain any advantage over the other. It was, in fact, a diplomatic truce, during which the more or less warring interests of the two coun-

tries would not be pushed while Persia was turning an important corner. It is a remarkable evidence of the progress of the Anglo-Russian *rapprochement* that Russia was willing to abstain from scheming at a moment when it would be easy for her to make terms to her own advantage with one or other of the parties in the State whose existence hung in the balance.

In the chapters on Russian Turkestan I have advanced the view that Russian policy in Central Asia has not always been an expression of the unanimous ideas of those who were responsible for the government of Russia. Foreign military and financial policies were frequently at variance, and action abroad depended to a great extent upon the degree of Court favour enjoyed by different Ministers, or by the varying influence of parties committed to certain lines of action. Evidence of the antagonism which sometimes arises between the different departments of State has frequently been observed by students of Russian politics, and what happened in Persia at this time is a minor but clear illustration of how promise and fulfilment may diverge under the Russian system.

There was to be no currying favour with the future king of Persia by either Power, nor was there to be any active support given to the Mejlis in the peaceful process of revolution which was being engineered through its medium. If Russia had already ingratiated herself with the Vali Ahd, we had given *bast* in the Legation grounds to the new reform party. If Russia backed the Vali Ahd, the Mejlis would be swept away like chaff. If we encouraged the democrats, they would revolt on the spot. And so, to avoid complications, and because each Power was anxious to avoid arousing the susceptibilities of the other, the Ministers agreed to sit tight and watch the struggle of the new-born Mejlis, and the approach of the Vali Ahd, without doing

anything but offer their deepest sympathy to both movements.

Nevertheless Russian fingers went into the pie. Teheran was unanimous that no blame attached to the Russian Minister, and that he acted in good faith throughout. But there is no glossing over the two facts, that a Russian officer with an escort went to meet the Vali Ahd at Kazvin, and that the Russian Bank at Teheran sent to the same place £5000 for the use of the future king. There can be no doubt that the Russian officer acted under instructions from the War Office at St Petersburg, nor any doubt that the Bank agent at Teheran was instructed by the Minister of Finance. Both actions were flagrant breaches of an understanding. The consequences were not important, but the Vali Ahd will always remember that Russia did the polite thing at a ticklish moment, while we did nothing. As already remarked, the Russian Minister is supposed to be entirely innocent of the steps taken by the representatives of the other two departments, who are independent of him, and who do not take orders from the Foreign Office. But it is this sort of thing that gives Russian diplomacy such a bad name, for it never can be just absolutely certain that there has been no telepathy in St Petersburg when one department independently takes action which traverses the undertakings of another department, and incidentally gains an advantage for Russia.

Persian public opinion in regard to Russia and ourselves is a quantity somewhat difficult of analysis. As foreigners we are both disliked, and held in contempt. The new spirit of nationalism is especially strong as regards foreign countries which have obtained control of public institutions, and which have thus limited the liberty and aspirations of the more enlightened of the Shah's subjects. It is a deep grievance that Belgians

should occupy all the highest and best paid appointments in the Customs; it is inequitable that a British bank should monopolise for the next forty years the right to issue bank-notes; while it is a positive robbery that Russia should collar an enormous sum every year from the proceeds of the Customs. That the Belgians have completely reorganised the Customs department and nearly doubled the revenue; that the British bank pays handsomely for its monopoly and has invested large capital in the country; and that Russia only draws the interest on money lent, are points of view which the patriotic Persian cannot attain. Nor can one fail to recognise that in this matter the Persian is not altogether undeserving of sympathy. For of all the value received in exchange for the privileges, concessions, liens, &c., involved, the Persian has received not a penny, nor has Persia apparently been a penny the better. The Shah has grabbed everything for himself and his hordes of blood-suckers, and Heaven alone knows where the money has gone.

Russia has lent the Persian Government £4,000,000; another £1,200,000 has been borrowed from other European sources; large sums have been sunk in the various enterprises referred to in a previous chapter. Yet to-day Persia is a poorer country than she was twenty years ago. The treasures accumulated by previous rulers, and valued at immense sums, have almost disappeared, while of public works, improved communications, well-organised forces for defence, there are no signs whatever. Indeed, there is no more pitiable example of the evils arising from the contact of the new civilisation with the ancient than is presented by effete, old-time, degenerate, extravagant, silly Persia. Europe has thrown money at her, and it has done her as much good as gin has done the benighted negro. It has stimulated the desire for cheap, nasty, unnecessary, and unprofitable goods, and given

birth to a commerce that is false and unnatural. For twenty years Persia has imported nearly £2,000,000 worth per annum more than she has exported. There is not a railway, or a factory, or an irrigation canal, or a decently trained and armed body of troops to show for it. The ready money passed in by foreign agency came from the clouds, the Persian spent gaily, found abundance of opportunities for further senseless expenditure, and continued his absurd career until to-day the country is bankrupt, the people discontented, and violent revolution an ever-present possibility.

The straits to which the Persian Government have recently been reduced would be absurd if they were not pathetic. If a ten-pound note is required for some petty disbursement, an order for payment is given on the Customs department. That department pays out money as fast as it comes in, and has on its files hundreds of such orders which cannot be cashed for lack of funds. If the payment must be made and the Customs fail, then recourse is had to the Imperial Bank. That institution has done a good deal of advancing, and is disposed to do no more without ample security. It is a fact, I believe, that there is continually recurring in Teheran a condition of affairs in which there is absolutely no money in the Treasury, and when the authorities cannot lay hands on sums as trifling as that I have mentioned. The troops in Teheran are in hopeless arrear of pay, and it is a fact that the Legations in foreign capitals have received no money for salaries or upkeep for over a year. The last-mentioned circumstance has given rise to a scandalous trade in decorations and appointments, by which impoverished plenipotentiaries are enabled to keep the pot boiling. At one foreign capital it is said that a certain individual, whose personality prevents his entrance into polite society, pays the Persian Legation the equivalent of £2000 per annum for the appointment of Consul-

General, the holding of which gives him a social status otherwise unattainable. One need not believe everything one hears in this connection, but it is quite certain that the Legations must live, and that of late their revenue has not been derived from Teheran.

Within the last year the situation had become so serious that Russia and Britain, as the two Powers most nearly concerned in the preservation of order in Persia, joined in offering the Government a loan of £400,000 to relieve pressing necessities. They stipulated for supervision of the expenditure of the money, and required the usual lien on the Customs as a guarantee. The new Mejlis discussed the matter, and unanimously scouted the idea of accepting aid from abroad and further alienating the resources of the country. To provide the money urgently required, the Mejlis propose a National Bank with enormous capital, all to be subscribed in the country. From the quantity of eloquence and patriotism generated by this wild-cat scheme, it might be supposed that the capital was subscribed many times over. But in reality the merest trifle of money has been found, and the necessities of the Government are as great as ever. The difficulty in finding money is due partly to the fact that there is very little cash in the country, and chiefly to the utter want of confidence of every Persian in his neighbour. Anybody who possesses any considerable sum of coin buries it deep in the earth, and will no more admit its possession than he would acknowledge a friendship for the devil. And a very necessary precaution too, when it is understood how expert are Persian grandees at extracting money from reluctant inferiors.

That England should associate herself with Russia in offering to lend money came as a blow to the democratic party in Teheran. Hitherto we have been regarded as much more the friend of Persia than Russia, and we have demonstrated on more than one occasion in recent times

that we have no territorial designs upon the country. The refuge afforded to the reformers last summer in the Legation grounds, and the tactful mediation of our Minister between the Government and the leaders of the movement, had raised British prestige to a high level, and greatly disconcerted Russian diplomacy. That we, the friend and brother, should suddenly turn round and join Russia, the arch-traitor, in an attempt further to enmesh Persia in financial obligation, was indeed a glimpse of the cloven hoof. With the autocratic party our action was no less unwelcome, for it suggested that in future it would not be possible to play off one Power against the other in the old, sweet, Asiatic manner. From the clouds our prestige dropped to the ground, and we are now known to be little else than a ravening lion awaiting a suitable opportunity to gobble up our share of unhappy Persia. This was the moment for Germany to intervene with her banking scheme.

It is difficult to realise exactly what the reform party amounts to. In Egypt, in China, and some say even in India, there are reform parties. Common to all is dislike of the foreigner, and a heartfelt desire to kick him out. If we analyse motives, we find that the dominating impulse is jealousy. The foreigner takes over Customs, railways, banks, posts, telegraphs, &c., and no sooner has his energy and perspicacity been applied than these institutions immediately flourish like green bay-trees, and bring forth bushels of golden fruit. The foreigner conquers or assumes control of a country, and lo! its bankruptcy departs, and the revenue swells beyond belief. The native watches the process, learns a smattering of the methods, imbibes, without assimilating, some of the philosophy behind it all, and then thinks himself capable of doing likewise. He may almost come to believe that he is animated by the same spirit that spurs the foreigner to toil, regardless of self, that order, decency, and effici-

ency may be imported into the conduct of affairs. But the gulf is wide, and will remain fixed for many a generation. For the foreigner works with his eyes ever aiming at an ideal—whether the ideal be worthy or no is another matter—while the native cares not a tinker's curse about reform, and keeps in his mind's eye only his hatred of this superior being, and the gain that would accrue if the fabric created by the foreigner might pass into his own hands. That patriotism is beginning to dawn, or rather to take shape according to Western notions, in the East is clear enough, for the outside aggression that consolidated communities into nations in Europe is operating at high pressure in Asia, and forcing upon its various divisions the unanimity in outlook and purpose without which, under modern conditions, states cannot endure.

But in Persia there is as yet no real quickening of the national pulse. So far as is apparent to the outside gaze, the spirit of self-sacrifice, which is the only sure foundation of patriotism, is absent, and reform has only one meaning—displacement of the foreigner and all his works. Persia has no grievance against her rulers—except that they have sold the country to the foreigner. The reformers want the power in their own hands, not because they do not like absolutism, but because they cannot trust it as exemplified in the present royal family.

And these reformers are quite an insignificant proportion of the population, though it is true they are the most enlightened, and represent those parts of Persia which are most in touch with Western ideas. But after all Persia is an agricultural country, and the tiller of the soil is seldom a revolutionist. Nor in a country like Persia can he be reached by revolutionary propaganda, or in fact by any kind of propaganda. From the Persian border to Meshed, and from Meshed to Kazvin, I never once saw a Persian reading a newspaper. So far as I am aware, there are no newspapers published

throughout all Persia except two in Teheran, one of which is a Government publication. The Persians have no means of studying the politics of their country, and were it not for the Mullahs, they would know nothing and care less about the progress of events. All they want is to be allowed to farm in peace.

That is the attitude of the average Persian. The reform party is composed chiefly of the trading elements in Teheran and two other important towns in the north, plus the Mahomedan clergy, who have joined in the movement with the hope of controlling it, and regaining some of their waning ascendency in the State. The Mejlis, then, has little or no backing in the country, represents only the capital and the two towns already referred to, and exists only until such time as the new Shah finds himself sufficiently secure on the throne to assert his authority.

At the time, however, the chief attraction of Teheran was the Mejlis. This serious body sat day and night and animadverted upon the shortcomings of the existing *régime*. If members of the Duma went as far as did members of the Mejlis, it would mean Siberia; and if such things as are said with impunity to-day had been said in old-time Persia, nothing less than boiling oil would have been the fate of the sayers. But Persians take this idea of parliamentary privilege quite seriously, and endeavour to import into the debates of their national assembly all the fire that is characteristic of party government in the most civilised countries. And the quaint thing is, that when one member calls another all the bad names in the Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic languages, he means it from the bottom of his heart. When Mr A. B. in our Parliament says that Mr C. B. has made an unholy alliance with Mr W. C., and that the pair of them have treacherously sold the country to the devil, all the right honourable gentlemen concerned understand that this is merely a parliamentary euphemism, employed for the

edification of the electorate. But it isn't like that in Persia. High officials of state are openly accused of bribery and corruption, the motives of friendly nations are laid bare with a frankness that would make Prince Hohenlohe shudder in his grave, and pessimism in regard to human nature in general is the keynote of all discussion.

To attend a sitting of so original and interesting a body became a prime necessity with the writer. True, I was ignorant of the Persian language, but that is a small drawback to the physiognomist—witness how E. T. R. puts character into feet and temperament under waistcoats. So one day I sallied forth with the intention of calling upon a friend whom I knew to be intimate with the country and people, and who had expressed willingness to find a place for me in the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery.

I found my friend at home, and with him a young gentleman of distinguished manners and appearance who bore a Persian name. We were soon deep in discussion of the politics of the hour, and gradually my superior knowledge of the situation—I had been seven days in Teheran—made them yield the floor to me. The point was whether the Vali Ahd would sign the Constitution which had been drafted by the Mejlis, and which the leaders of that body were known to be pressing both on the heir to the throne and its dying occupant. I had fifty convincing reasons why the Vali Ahd should not put his name to a document that stripped him of most of the power and influence appertaining to royalty. They had certainly flimsy arguments on the other side, but advanced them with a diffidence and lack of assurance that made me all the more emphatic in support of my own view. If I had only known what they had up their sleeves! But the spirit of the redacteur was strong within me, and I became as dogmatic as a public-house politician.

When the young Persian got his second wind he told me marvellous things about the doings and intentions of the Mejlis, and invited me to accompany him to a very important sitting that was to take place the same afternoon. He agreed to eat his lunch with me first, and it was during the meal that I had an opportunity to discover who and what he was. Apparently he was a sort of private secretary to the leading members of the Mejlis, and a person in whom much trust was placed. As a Europeanised and educated young man he was regarded as a mentor by his less sophisticated countrymen; and in his pocket at that very moment was the original draft of the Constitution which was creating so much excitement. I was in luck indeed, and felt as if the mantle of de Blowitz was about to descend upon me. As we drove to the Mejlis, I put forth all my art in the endeavour to find out what were the leading features of this interesting and to be historic document. He fenced with me like an Irish horse-dealer, until I became exceedingly keen for a glimpse of the little roll of paper that bulged the breast-pocket of his frock-coat. I began to see that a copy of it might be procured—at a price. I made it plain that I wanted a copy, but my Caledonian soul utterly declined to hint at a figure compatible with the dignity and incorruptibility of this ardent young patriot. While desire to possess and dislike to part were waging fierce battle within my breast we arrived at the Parliament House, and for the time being my thoughts were diverted.

The Mejlis sat in the palace of a former Prime Minister, and the crowds that surrounded the entrance showed that something unusual was on the tapis. My friend escorted me up a fine staircase covered with carpets, and then through a series of small anterooms. The last of these had a glass door through which was visible the assembly room. This was a large chamber lighted by

many windows, and hung with chandeliers that were masses of sparkling crystal. Half the floor was dense with squatting spectators, the other half being reserved for the Mejlis. All round the reserved space sat the members who had arrived. They were all sitting in Oriental fashion, with their legs crossed tailor-wise in front of them. A good number seemed to be Mullahs of holy and venerable aspect, some wore the ordinary long garments of the merchant or man of business, while only a few were attired in the frock-coat, trousers, and astrakhan hats affected by polite and educated Persians. So far as I could see, none wore European dress. As new arrivals came in they were saluted with gravity, and room made for them on the floor. There was no cheering or demonstration of any kind, though members talked freely among themselves, and the crowded audience kept up a loud murmur of hushed conversation. Everything was orderly, and if there was any dominating expression on the faces of these embryo legislators it was that of intense respectability.

Meanwhile my friend had deserted me for his duties behind the scenes, and I was left peering through the glass door, with an overflow of spectators from the door of the assembly chamber. The little room was soon crowded, and I found myself flattened against the wall in a not very comfortable position. Then our little door was opened, and we were pushed forward from behind right into the midst of the squatting crowd. I was the only European present, and when my neighbours found out that I was British I was treated with every kindness and courtesy. They offered me room on the floor, but my legs were so stiff I could not unbend, so was given a place in the very front of those who were standing, and where I could see and hear all that went on. The man next to me knew three or four words of French, so I was not altogether friendless.

Proceedings opened with what I took to be a prayer, or invocation. Then a personage who sat on a small raised platform made a short speech, evidently announcing something important, for the audience applauded freely as he emphasised various points. Finally a dignified man got up with a bundle of papers and began to read amid intense silence. Occasionally the listeners intervened with their equivalent for "Hear, Hear," but on the whole they took it very calmly, and though it was evident that they were deeply interested, there was no display of emotion or excitement. The continual occurrence of the word Mejlis, and repeated reference to the Shah-in-Shah, the country, and matters connected with administration, at last forced me to realise what was happening. The document being read was no less than the Constitution itself, and when the end came the reader announced the signatures of his Majesty and his Royal Highness the Vali Ahd!

So while I was arguing in the morning that the Vali Ahd would never sign, his signature had been already affixed! As the crowded assembly broke up with much animated conversation, I there and then renounced the mantle of de Blowitz for all time. When I espied my young Persian friend there was a malicious twinkle in his eye, but he had the decency not to refer to our discussion of the morning, and only requested me to rejoice with him in his country's newborn freedom. Both the Shah and the Vali Ahd had given in all along the line, and the Mejlis had got all it wanted. Persia thenceforward was a constitutionally governed country, and absolute monarchy was at an end — on paper. Truly a mighty revolution, achieved without bloodshed and inaugurated with oceans of friendly sentiment.

It was impossible to avoid thinking what revolution has cost other states. The Terror of a century ago achieved a smaller result; Russia has been seething with

disorder for two years, and has effected almost nothing in comparison. Yet Persia without an effort, without the loss of a life, without sacrifice, has advanced to a stage that other countries reach only through fire heated seven times seven. The announcement of the triumph of the Mejlis did not evoke a single cheer, every eye was dry, cheerful laughter and chatter were all the signs to show how deeply the Persian heart was stirred by a great event. To give it reality there was needed bloodshot eyes, voices hoarse with sustained cheering, figures drunken and reeling with heartfelt emotion. But there was nothing of that sort. It was indeed hard to avoid thinking that every Persian had his tongue in his cheek, and that he believed as much in the reality of the transformation as Mr Pepper believes in the substantiality of his ghosts.

Later in the evening my Persian friend came to me at the hotel and said that in his pocket was an English translation of the more important clauses of the Constitution. I held out my hand for it with some eagerness, never doubting that what was read out in public was now common property. Not so, however. The translation has been made for my special benefit, and it was worth paying for. I was not unwilling to pay within reason for a copy, but I was astonished to find that my visitor considered his document worth the equivalent of £10. Seeing that every Legation in Teheran was busy translating the official copies furnished them by the Government, and that in the morning our own Legation would have the complete translation ready, it seemed an extravagant demand. I suggested that a sovereign would not be a bad price, but the youth thought I wanted it badly, and would not abate. He was astonished and disappointed to find that I changed the subject abruptly, and displayed no further interest in his expensive but now valueless papers.

I have detailed my experience with this young man at some length, because I cannot but think it somewhat typical of things Persian and of the Persian himself. My friend posed as possessing in a confidential capacity the original of a confidential document. And for a consideration he was willing to let me have a copy of that document. Needless to say, however, he had never possessed the original document, and the copy which he could have easily procured was already in the hands of many people. Then when the Constitution had been read out in the Mejlis he tried to palm off upon me at a high price a part translation that was practically valueless, because in the morning I could have got it complete for nothing. Not only was he unscrupulous in his desire to make a trifle, but he was foolishly greedy in trying to make too much. That is the average Persian all over. He is always trying to make money crookedly, and is never content. During my Persian travels I have had occasion to make small presents many scores of times, and never once was I thanked, although frequently for lack of small change I gave more than was necessary. The invariable answer was a Persian phrase which means "may your kindness be increased."

It is, of course, both hard and unfair to generalise upon the people of any country, unless one's experience has been wide and spread over a long period. I must at once begin by confessing that my opportunities of forming a judgment upon Persian character have been confined to those walks of life wherein degeneration must inevitably be visible. From the Persian frontier to Meshed I traversed a trade route throughout which it had become the business of every man to get what he could out of the passer-by. From Meshed to Teheran the great pilgrim road offered a living to the very scum of Persia—ne'er-do-wells, born-tireds, outcasts, forming the bulk of the population, settled or moving, which

exists at the expense of the thousands of aspirants to divine honours who annually make the journey. The few Persians I encountered in Teheran were those who had suffered the deterioration which is the inevitable consequence of contact with the European. The more educated Persians I met had imbibed some of the philosophy of the West, had discarded those prejudices which are at once the safeguard and the complement of Asiatic temperament, and were become those dislocated, deranged, deorganised beings who result from the endeavour to engraft upon Asiatic stock the civilisation of Europe. There is a curious unanimity in books upon Persia in regard to the character of the Persian. Nobody has any belief in him or seems to think that there is any hope for him. Personally I have little evidence to offer in confirmation of this view, but I cannot help remarking upon the connection between the physical alterations which are taking place in Central Asia and the obvious and undoubted change in the character of the inhabitants within historic times.

Persia was once wealthy, populous, and powerful—things possible only to a virile race. Central Asia was the cradle of Western nations, if we are to believe the philologist, and its inhabitants were the mightiest on the face of the earth. But to-day its peoples are decayed, their virility has departed, and they have become the cat's-paw of nations from other regions. The desiccation which is spreading over Central Asia and Persia is setting its mark on the face of the land, and who shall say that the inhabitants have escaped the dread invasion.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CASPIAN LITTORAL.

THERE are few capital cities in the world so difficult or so disagreeable of access as Teheran. Coming or going is equally unpleasant, and the only redeeming feature of the journey is that it completely keeps at bay the woeful and unspeakable globe-trotter. Prior to the construction of the railway to Baku on the Caspian, the metropolis of Persia was approached *viâ* Bushire on the Gulf, or Trebizond on the Black Sea, either land journey entailing about forty days of travel. But with the advent of Russian railways in the Caucasus the routes to Teheran were revolutionised, and now there is but the one way, unless you are an old-fashioned circumlocutionist who prefers two sides of a triangle. The Messageries from Marseilles, or a tramp from Liverpool, will carry you through the Bosphorus to Batoum on the Black Sea, whence there is a day's journey by train to Baku. Baku may also be reached by rail across Europe. Thereafter come 250 miles in a steamer on the Caspian, then some miles in a small boat, then a few days in a carriage, and you are at Teheran.

The carriage part is the worst, unless one encounters a storm on the Caspian, which is worse than Cape Horn, the Bay of Biscay, and the Big Minch combined. It is also the most expensive part of the journey, and none but a millionaire or a Government servant ought to attempt

it. Though the distance is only 200 miles, the cost amounts to nearly thirty golden sovereigns, a sum almost impossible of reduction to a polite traveller. But every month the British Legation sends to the Foreign Office in London a huge leather bag containing dispatches. The bag goes to the Caspian by gholam—the Persian prototype for the chuprassi of India—thence by King's Messenger to St Petersburg, and then by another King's Messenger to London. So I decided to accompany the bag for economy's sake, and because the gholam would be a useful person to travel with. The gholam in charge of the bag duly chartered a carriage, and as there was plenty room in it, I obtained the kind permission of the proper authorities to occupy one of the vacant seats. And so we started.

I said farewell to Suliman, who announced that he was going to walk back to Meshed so as to save the money I had given him for riding. There arose in my mind a wonder to know if the mental attitude indicated by the intention to walk 559 miles in order to save fifty shillings was frequent in the human breast. An ancestor of mine who lived on the shores of a Highland loch was once visited by a beggar who asked if he might take away an old 56-lb. weight that lay in a corner. My forebear assented, and gave the man twopence to pay his fare across the ferry. But the beggar, like Suliman, was of a saving disposition, and walked forty miles round the loch, carrying his prize, rather than spend the twopence on being rowed across. These two cases certainly suggest that mankind is capable of great self-denial in the pursuit of filthy lucre.

I must say a few words about the gholam. He is an individual similar in nature to the chuprassi, particularly as regards his indispensability in the conduct of affairs of state. He hangs about the doors of great men and extracts monetary contributions from those who would

horses, or even the glare of the eye watching the bag. The only trouble was unbending in the morning.

The first hundred miles out of Teheran was an exact repetition of the Meshed road—desert, more desert, still desert, with tiny but delightful oases interspersed. At the ninety-sixth mile we reached the important city of Kazvin, said to contain 30,000 inhabitants, a goodly proportion of whom appeared to me to be out of town. From Teheran, at an elevation of 3800 feet above sea-level, we had climbed to Kazvin, 4100 feet, the rise being quite imperceptible. Thereafter, however, we began to ascend in earnest, for the great Elburz range had to be crossed before it was possible to reach the Caspian. Unfortunately the highest part was negotiated during the middle of the night, when I was conscious of nothing but fearful cold that my sleeping-bag, the hot-water bottle, and piles of clothes could not keep out. The pass is somewhat over 7000 feet high, and is of considerable strategic importance. I was sorry to have missed it, for its position makes it a vital consideration in any railway scheme which may be projected for connecting Teheran with the Caspian. However, day broke soon after we had passed the summit, and I was able to realise the extraordinary transformation which had taken place in the character and appearance of the country. We had entered upon a new and delightful Persia, heavily wooded, richly clad in green, and spangled with laughing water. The cause of this remarkable change is extremely interesting, and worthy of some explanation.

In writing of the physical characteristics of Persia, and therefrom venturing to generalise upon the economic potentialities, I have always indicated an exception to the prevailing conditions. Throughout Central Asia there is operating the process of desiccation to which I have made frequent reference, and which is afflicting Persia as well as the adjoining countries on the northern

and north-eastern borders. It is well understood by geologists that the Black, Caspian, and Aral Seas are pools left by the subsistence of a great inland sea similar in character to the Mediterranean. The eastern shore was formed by the series of mountain-ranges running north from the Pamirs to the Thian Shan mountains. In the south were the Bokharan ranges and the system bounding the northern frontiers of Persia. In the west the Black and Caspian Seas were merged north of the Caucasus, which must have projected into the sea peninsula-wise. In the north this mighty sea faded away into swamps and marshes that are now the fertile wheat-growing steppes of Eastern Russia. Conjure up this landlocked ocean, and it becomes immediately possible to conceive a Persia fertile and populous, a Central Asia under water but fringed by prosperous countries whose argosies sailed abroad, and returned to wealthy ports laden with the spoils and treasures of distant lands.

So great an expanse of water must have given off evaporation that afforded an ample rainfall to adjacent countries, and Persia in these days must have been a totally different place. But mighty causes have been at work, and the great Central Asian lake has now dwindled until there is nothing left but the three inland seas already named. Of these the Caspian actually lies some 80 feet below sea-level, and desiccation is in such active progress that one of its inlets, with a superficial area of about 4000 square miles, is now completely dry where a hundred years ago it was navigable.

Where Persia used to draw a rainfall from millions of square miles of water she now, in the north, is restricted to the limited area of the Caspian Sea. The hot sun draws from its breast the life-giving moisture, the wind carries it swiftly southward until the Elburz mountains are encountered, when the clouds precipitate

For this purpose two Renard trains have been sent to Teheran, and I had the pleasure of meeting one of them on the road. The unfortunate contrivance was stuck on one of the gradients, and I marvel how it ever got to Teheran. I wonder if the promoters of the Teheran-Meshed motor scheme have ever been over that road, and if they comprehend the difference to motor traffic between travelling over a loose surface and over the hard surface of a properly made road. There seems to me to be some fearful midsummer madness come to people who plan to do things in Persia, and not the least mad is this Meshed motor scheme. If there already existed a road with perfect surface and 570 miles long, I think it possible that the venture might pay, despite the heavy expense of importing petrol, and the fearful allowances for depreciation which all experience with motor traction proves to be necessary. But a road with such a surface is unattainable in Persia, because of the expense of making it and of keeping it up. So the Renard train with its solid tyres must travel on a loose sandy road into which it must sink, and which must get worse and worse in the dry atmosphere. The consequence will be that draught power will be reduced to a minimum, and that the wagons with merchandise and the carriages full of pilgrims will have to be cut down to vanishing-point. And then where will be the returns that are to pay a dividend? Besides, there are innumerable places where the gradients are too steep for motor traction, and at such points new roads will have to be made—and where is the money to come from?

After fifty-two hours' incessant travelling we arrived at Resht. During this time I had had no sleep, other than was obtainable crouched half on the seat and half in the well of the carriage. Nor throughout the journey was I able to speak one word to my companion. But

at Resht our Vice-Consul hospitably took me in, and I was once more able to disgorge myself of the pearls of speech. Our arrival at Resht took place after dark, and in the morning there was no time to spare, so I had no opportunity to observe anything except that it seemed an extraordinarily busy place for Persia. Immediately after breakfast the gholam chartered two phaetons, and we spent one or two hours driving to the landing-place, a distance of only a very few miles, rendered tedious by bad roads and continual delays from strings of bullock-carts.

At the landing-place we got a boat manned by half a dozen rowers, and boasting a tall mast but no sail. In this rather elegantly fitted craft we commenced a long and interminable voyage down a narrow combination of canal and river, bordered by fields and swamps. The men ceased rowing when we were clear of the traffic, and began towing at a long rope affixed to the top of the mast. At the end of the canal we hoped to get a steam-launch which would carry us across the lagoon to Enzeli, the port on the Caspian. But delays on the way had caused us to miss the launch, and we were compelled to continue in the row-boat for another five miles.

Enzeli is a curious place. It lies with its back to the low shores of the Caspian Sea, while its front faces a large lagoon connected with the Caspian by a narrow strait. The lagoon is shallow, covered with wildfowl, alive with fish, and fringed all round with swamps and dense jungles of reed. At Enzeli there are many trees, and from the water it looks a cosy and picturesque place. But the streets are dreary and dirty, and the houses green and mouldy from the pervading dampness. The gholam took me to the Hôtel de Paris, than which a more miserable or uninviting hostelry cannot exist in all the world. I spent a most uncomfortable evening

and night, buoyed up only by the hope of the morning, which was to see us on board the mail-boat. The gholam now bade me farewell, for it was his duty to put his precious bag on board the steamer at the first blush of daylight, and to receive in exchange from the King's Messenger from St Petersburg another bag for the Legation.

Although there are hardly any finer fisheries in the world than those of the south coast of the Caspian, I was unable to get fish for breakfast, to my deep disappointment, for one's soul longs for a taste of something that swims, after living for months on creatures that run and fly. I satisfied the craving by going into the garden and eating half a dozen oranges straight from the trees. In the garden I met a countryman who had travelled in rear of me from Teheran, and who had arrived at the same hotel in the middle of the night. He was in a very bad temper because he had been given a small room in which were roosting a number of fowls. Whenever he lit his candle the cocks thought it morning and began crowing, an unnerving performance at close quarters.

I was anxious to avoid another meal at this hotel, and proposed to my new friend that we should go off to the steamer at once. But he had the fatuity to want to see Enzeli, and preferred going off after lunch, when the Russian steamer company provided a launch for passengers. I had been warned of the changeful nature of the Caspian, and should have hired a row-boat and gone off alone while the weather was fine. But after all these months of solitary travel I was so glad to strike a companion, and to get rid of the responsibility of making up my own mind, that I deferred to his wishes and agreed to delay.

After *déjeuner* at the Hôtel de Paris, we collected our traps and proceeded to the wharf. Here we waited

two hours getting our baggage examined by the Persians for dutiable goods—there are export as well as import duties to pay in Persia. We made inquiries about the launch, and were told that the rising of the wind made the bar too rough for a crossing. When we were all ready, however, the captain of the launch said he would go if we would give him ten tomans (£2 sterling). We said we would see him burnt first, and by the advice of two Persian gentlemen who accosted us we chartered a surf-boat for five tomans. The Persians were also bound for Europe, and had with them a little boy with blue eyes and black hair. We all got into the boat, a long, flat-bottomed craft with a prow like a war-canoe, and the eight rowers began lashing the water with short sticks to which were attached little flat boards.

We were soon clear of the shore and paddling towards the bar. This was an expanse of broken water stretching from side to side of the opening into the lagoon, and was about a mile long and half a mile broad. In the middle of it was a great V of smooth water, the apex pointing out to sea. From a distance the waves on the bar did not look very formidable, but when we had entered the wide opening of the V and found great creaming rollers majestically passing along on either hand we began to realise that the Enzeli bar possessed character and individuality. At the top of the fast-narrowing approach of good water there seemed to be a hundred yards of heavy overfalls, and as we closed up and began to rise to the rollers I took the precaution of opening the buttons of my overcoat and unslinging glasses and camera.

By this time the rowers were working like demons, and shouting at each splash of their oars. The steersman encouraged them in a loud voice, and I calculated that he was the man whose face would indicate when

danger arose. Then the long boat reared wildly at one great sea and plunged over it, burying her prow deep into the succeeding roller. Half a ton of water jumped abroad, the hissing and frothing wave swept past, curling high over the gunwale and splashing us as it went by. The steersman shouted something to the rowers, who immediately stopped work. I looked at the gentleman, and observed that his face had changed from ruddy bronze to grey putty. The fool was paralysed, and could not even give the order to keep way on the boat, and let her drift back head to the waves. Round she swung and, broadside on, we were soused twice in quick succession. It was a mercy they happened both to be small rollers, which swept us back into easy water without more harm than a wetting. It seemed clear enough that the bar could not be crossed.

The rowers got to work again without any shouting, and the shaking steersman headed back to Enzeli. Whenever we were quite clear of broken water one of the Persians grasped my arm and said in an agonised voice:—

"When you open your coat and take off your straps, my heart become like water." Here he gasped, and then continued, "And when that wave jump on the boat, I die, I die! I living man now, but in that bad place I dead man."

What my friend and self said to the steersman as we slowly returned to the wharf is not for repetition in print. Nor was the unhappy man's cup of agony yet full. A large crowd awaited us, and in the fore-front was a gesticulating figure that began to shout when we were yet far off. My Persian neighbour said that the man on shore was the owner of the boat, and that he was cursing the steersman for having so nearly lost his precious craft. He called him a fool,

a coward, a rogue, a son of burnt father—and then ordered him forward to take an oar, while he himself leaped aboard and declared that *he* would take the boat through the surf, and *he* would show all Enzeli how to cross a bar. I confess to having felt little enthusiasm for a second attempt, and I know that my Persian friend wailed bitterly for dry land. Our first outward passage had been marked by much joking and hilarity on the part of the passengers, and great good-humour in the crew, who anticipated a fat present from such merry travellers. But the spirit of levity was now dead within us. The timid Persian was the only one who spoke, and all he could do was to wonder in an hysterical voice whether this time he would come back to life again. Every minute he died, only to live to die another death, and another, and another.

Our new steersman bragged all the way out to the bar, cursed his crew generally, and made a dead-set at his predecessor at the helm, who now laboured worthily at the ninth oar. He certainly was an eagle-eyed fellow, and the whole of Enzeli blackened the beach watching his prowess. His complaint against the other was that he did not choose the right place to attempt the crossing, and that he lost his head for no reason at all. There lies the mail-boat, said he, pointing to a little steamer that lay plunging at her hawser in the blue water beyond the bar, and in ten minutes the Sahibs will be safe aboard her and dry as the inside of a bread-oven.

The gallant fellow's prediction was right, partially, for we were quite dry when we got back to Enzeli. But as for getting aboard the steamer, no. We entered the mouth of the V, rowed furiously down past the converging breakers, and got our bows lifted sky-high by the first roller encountered. I was watching the face of the steersman, and at the very first heave the

fire went out of his eye, and at the second came the putty-like colour. He had the presence of mind to keep her head to the seas, and ordered the rowers just to keep her moving. We were soon swept backward and out of danger. The bar was impossible, and that night the steamer hauled in her anchor and sailed away without us.

I did not know it at the time, but the Enzeli bar has a terrible record. Every year there is a long list of drownings, and many Europeans have lost their lives in its treacherous waves. It is a frequent experience in winter for the steamer with the mails to be unable to communicate with the shore. When this happens she returns to Baku, and the mails must await another week. Passengers from Persia to Europe are often kept waiting for two or three weeks at Enzeli because the bar is uncrossable, and mails and passengers from Baku have sometimes to return to that unholy place week after week owing to the impracticability of landing. A comparatively light wind raises a heavy sea on the shallow waters of the Caspian Sea, and short vicious rollers plunge across the bar of the Enzeli lagoon in irresistible fury. No boat can live in such water, and even when the sea is perfectly calm there are rollers that make the passage far from pleasant.

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Here I must now end this record of peaceful travel and unexciting adventure, for the steamer voyage to Baku and the monotonous crossing of Europe in a train form no part of the journey with which my volume deals. Having left Calcutta in the first week of January 1906, I was travelling for almost exactly a year, reaching London in the latter half of January 1907. During that period I covered about 6000 miles, of which 2500 were accomplished riding, 800 on foot, 400 in carriages, and the remainder by Indian and Russian railways. I

worked as I went along, and the observations here recorded were written when in actual contact with the problems discussed, often while the scenery described was visible from the door of my tent. As the book will not be published for some months I have thought of rewriting portions, but have decided to refrain, with the idea that what is written on the spur of the moment is just as likely to be illuminating as the words of wisdom that are increased and multiplied with the lapse of time. I must trust to a final chapter for modifications or elucidations suggested by longer consideration.

SUMMARY.

CHAPTER XLII.

BRITAIN AND RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA.

HAVING travelled through Central Asia with the express object of gaining some understanding of the physical and economic conditions obtaining in regions strategically adjacent to India, it would seem necessary that I should endeavour to present to my readers as a whole the situation which I have laboured to explain in detail. The broad question involved is easily defined, for it amounts to no more than that a rival Power covets the brightest jewel in the British Crown. We have seen that Nature has fringed the northern boundaries of India with a system of mountains unrivalled throughout the world for stupendousness and impenetrability. Not only that, but the exterior slopes of these mountains command in all directions wide sweeps of desert that are almost as difficult of transit as the towering natural fortifications that form an inner line of defence. While these desert regions were a no-man's-land into which Russia was unable, or did not care, to penetrate the problem of Frontier defence did not enter into Indian politics. Our armies in India were then maintained for

domestic purposes and for the retention in their proper places of the lawless and turbulent tribes dwelling on our borders.

But with Russia's penetration into Central Asia, her embridging by railroads the trackless deserts that were impassable to large armies, and her actual establishment of bases in the very foothills of the mountain defences of India, the situation entirely altered, and there arose the problem of how to defend our possession from the attack that threatened. It is beside the question that opinions may differ as to the precise object with which Russia gradually approached the Indian sheepfold. She may have been aiming for India all along, or various causes may have led her farther and farther afield, until proximity was attained without actual design. The important point is that Russia to-day is established on the glacis of our natural fortifications, and that she is in a position to commence sapping whenever the spirit so moves her.

A very little examination suffices to show why Russia has selected the neighbourhood of the Oxus river for her demonstration against India. Throughout the whole of the length of the Himalayas, from Assam in the south-east to Kashmir in the north-west, there is no gap easier of negotiation than that debouching into the Chumbi Valley. Bhutan and Nepal have openings to the north, but all are more difficult than the route used by the Younghusband Expedition. When we consider the experiences of the force which after much labour succeeded in penetrating into Thibet we can rest assured that no army is likely to march upon us by the same road. Further, and more conclusively, India is guarded in the north by Thibet itself as well as by the Himalayas, and while the terrible Chung Tang intervenes between us and the Siberian steppes we may feel satisfied that danger cannot threaten from this quarter.

The western borders of Thibet march with those regions which I traversed in my journey from Simla to Chinese Turkestan, and whoever followed me throughout that laborious experience needs no argument in support of the statement that the Karakoram route is absolutely impassable to anything more than a mere handful of men. Proceeding westward, the next negotiable opening in nature's barricade is that which passes through Gilgit and debouches upon the Pamirs. Between this and the Karakoram route there is little to choose, for though the latter is higher in elevation the former is much more difficult, owing to the narrowness of the valleys and the precipitous character of the existing track. The characteristics of the Gilgit route are reproduced in that through Chitral, and altogether it has been agreed upon by all authorities that none of the routes running from Kashmir to the Pamir region is practicable to considerable bodies of men.

Running westward from the Pamirs and gradually dwindling in elevation is the range of the Hindu Kush. A long and less elevated extension of this system is the Paropamisus range, which falls away in height as it stretches westward until in the neighbourhood of Herat it ends in rolling hills. From this point along the line of the Russo-Persian frontier to the Caspian Sea extends a low system of mountains that presents no great difficulties to military enterprise. Here we have a great alteration in conditions. East of the Pamirs there are the great mountain regions of Trans-Himalayan India and Thibet, none affording any possible line of advance to an enemy. But west of the Pamirs the Hindu Kush, the Paropamisus, and the Persian boundary ranges are easily pierced at innumerable points. Obviously it is useless for Russia to cast her eyes farther east than where the Hindu Kush merges into the Pamirs.

There is thus left for consideration only the Afghan

and Persian borders. To cross the Kopet Dagh, or any of the other ranges which divide Persia from Russian territory, would be comparatively plain sailing to an army properly equipped with transport, which in present days means a railroad. But having crossed, there is still Persia itself to be traversed before either Afghanistan or Beluchistan is reached. Whereas, as discussed in my chapter on Khorasan, the line of the Oxus is actually the Afghan border, and its adoption as a front leaves Persia on the right rear. Why march through Persia to reach Afghanistan when Afghan and Russian territory actually adjoin a little to the east? The shortest way to India from Central Asia is through Afghanistan, and provided the routes were practicable it was clearly Russia's business to forsake longer approaches and to take up her position in that section of her frontier which directly faced the Afghan border. Prior to the establishment of railways in Central Asia the first consideration of military strategy was to choose a line of advance through country that offered facilities in the way of water and supplies. But with the advent of railway communication, which effectually bridged desert regions, the character of the country to be crossed lost importance, and the main object became the taking up of the nearest possible position to the ultimate goal—India.

Hence we have the Kushk branch of the Transcaspian railway, and the projected branch to Termez, discussed in the chapter on Russia's military strength in Central Asia. We have seen that Russia has definitely committed herself to the Kushk-Termez line, and it is obvious that no departure from this front can be undertaken without the construction of an entirely new set of strategic railways. In regard to the country which now confronts Russia the world is well informed. The passes of the Hindu Kush have frequently been crossed by large armies during the last two thousand years, and

though modern artillery and munitions are much more difficult of transport than were those of bygone days, it would be too much to suppose that the natural difficulties would prevent a modern army, supported by modern contrivances, from effecting a crossing. Southward from Kushk there is nothing to check the advance of a large force, and the easy nature of the route makes it possible for Russia to throw troops forward upon Herat with the assurance that a light railway could come to their support in a matter of a few days.

Military operations, however, have always to be conducted with a view to the doings of the enemy, and in estimating the possibilities of the situation on the Afghan frontier it must not be forgotten that the British army on the Indian border is a factor necessary of consideration. In the event of complications our generals at Quetta and Peshawar would be very much on the alert, and we may be sure that in so far as it lay with them everything would be done to prevent the Russian forces from obtaining the initial advantages which are so important at the outbreak of war. Russia's first move must almost inevitably be upon Herat. The garrison of Herat consists of six battalions of infantry, plus a fair proportion of artillery. From all that can be heard of the Afghan army, we may conclude that its fighting value is much below that of any European army, and we may also assume that the best organised, best armed, and best disciplined troops of the Amir are not stationed so far away from his capital as at Herat. At Kushk, on the other hand, the whole of the garrison of Central Asia is within thirty hours' journey by train, and a column could be concentrated there, flung upon Herat, and have commenced shelling the citadel before it was known in Quetta or Kabul that the Russians were on the move. Who can doubt that the Afghans would be driven out long before reinforcements could reach them? Who will say that all

the King's men and all the King's horses on the distant Indian frontier could lift hand or foot to save the situation?

Having committed themselves to the advance upon Herat the Russians would be compelled to make a corresponding move in the east, or see the Hindu Kush occupied by us, and Kabul within the lines of our field army. To obviate this contingency they would strain every nerve to anticipate us at the Hindu Kush, and it will be interesting to consider which side would have the best chance of winning the race that must ensue for this all-important strategic line. We on our side are pledged to fight for the integrity of Afghanistan, while at the same time being debarred from setting foot in the country either with troops as a precautionary measure, or even in respect to engineers or intelligence officers. Having heard news of the advance of a comparatively small column on Herat, the Afghans might say to us that the moment for an intervention had not yet come; in fact that they hoped to be able to deal with the situation themselves.

During the time that would elapse whilst the Afghans were learning their impotence against Russian troops, the force based at Termez would have been launched upon Mazar-i-Sharif, and have made such progress towards the Hindu Kush that it would be hopeless for our columns to endeavour to anticipate them. With the Russians in possession of the Hindu Kush and dominating Kabul, could we depend upon the Afghans to remain on our side? It would look to them as if we were the losing side, and that it would be well to make terms with the stronger. It may be doing an injustice to the Afghans to suppose that they would be so ready to forget their obligations, but I defy anybody conversant with the Afghan temperament and with the internal organisation of the country to maintain that Afghanistan would stand

solidly by us once Russia got astride the Hindu Kush, which, virtually, would mean the possession of Kabul. Even if no obstacles were placed in the way of the advance of British troops immediately on the outbreak of war, it is difficult to see how we could be certain of reaching the Hindu Kush before our opponents.

Meanwhile our answer to the occupation of Herat might, or might not be, according to the temper of the Afghans, the occupation of Kandahar. It would be absolutely futile to attempt recovery of Herat, for long ere we could cross the four hundred miles intervening the Russians would have completed their railway, reinforced their army, and securely entrenched themselves. Infinitely more might be said in regard to the situation that would arise, some to prove that our position would not be so bad as has been painted, some to prove that it would even be worse.

Fortunately for us the very loss of the initial advantages would bring compensation, for henceforward the Russians would be at a disadvantage in having to attack us in carefully chosen positions. From a purely military point of view the British forces, based at Kandahar and, perhaps, Jelalabad, and entrenched, respectively, upon the Helmund and in the mountains east of Kabul, would be very happily placed, and might contemplate with equanimity the Russian endeavours to approach within striking distance. If the matter lay between the British and Russian armies alone we might await the issue with complete confidence.

But the situation holds other elements which have not yet been discussed. One of our great difficulties in conducting a campaign in Afghanistan would be that we must maintain between our forces in the field and their main bases on the upper Indus lines of communication that pass through the independent frontier tribes which have been responsible for practically all the war that has taken

place in India since the Mutiny. These tribes, in the event of our success against the Russian army, would have to contemplate the extreme probability that, having large forces in the field, we would take the opportunity to draw their stings for ever. They would certainly find the chance of raiding too tempting to be neglected, even if Russian intrigue did not result in their definitely taking up arms against us. Lord Kitchener's recent reorganisation of the Indian Army provides for a force of nine divisions to take the field in the event of war, and if we are to accept the estimate of one of the most brilliant military writers of the day, nearly the whole of this army would need to be devoted to the securing of communications, leaving a mere fraction to confront the Russians in battle. Further, if what we have recently seen of the temper of some of our subjects in India may be considered as an earnest of what to expect in the future, then in time of war every outlying station in the country would require military protection, and every railway would have to be patrolled throughout its length. There would, indeed, be no end to the opportunities for employing troops in duties for other than fighting the enemy.

Truly an ugly situation. That its realisation, in some degree or another, was a possibility in the earlier years of the century it would be hard to deny. That something approximate was the problem confronting the Government of India, during the period that the Orenburg-Tashkent line was approaching completion, nobody can doubt. It would be of extreme interest to know to what extent our disadvantage on the Afghan border prompted us to accept an ally who was both able and willing to create a diversion. Was there any correlation between our difficulties in Central Asia and the war in Manchuria? That war certainly came as a godsend to us, for it occurred at that psychological moment when Russian railway projects in Turkestan were approaching their climax, and when

our military authorities in India were hard put to it to devise measures to meet the danger that threatened.

For the moment Russia is incapable of aggressiveness in Central Asia, and in the writer's belief there is a very reasonable hope that the recent modification in the autocratic nature of her government will tend to lessen the influence of the military party that has been responsible for the arising of the present situation. This is proved, to some extent, by the generally expressed belief that an Anglo-Russian Agreement will soon be forthcoming. Such an agreement would necessarily deal with questions at issue between Russia and ourselves in Central Asia, and would probably include clauses stipulating for mutual non-interference in Thibet, for the maintenance of Chinese sovereignty in Eastern Turkestan, for the delimitation of spheres of interest in Persia, and primarily for some sort of *modus vivendi* in regard to the Afghan frontier.

The advantages of such an agreement to us are manifest, for although Russia is down for the time being, her military strength remains unimpaired, and only the sinews of war are lacking. The danger of a popular war against us is lessened for the present, but has not disappeared from the future. We must therefore welcome any definite understanding which will guarantee a period of immunity; and, moreover, we must be prepared to pay a price for it. What that price may be it is useless to predict, but we may be assured that the bargain will be hotly criticised. Russia, too, may be a substantial gainer, for the 60,000 men maintained in Turkestan are entirely unnecessary to her hold on the country; and, with peace guaranteed, five-sixths of the garrison might well be dispensed with, to the saving of millions of pounds annually.

That an agreement of the kind we have been led to expect will permanently end the rivalry of Russia

and ourselves nobody can expect. Domestic politics in India, together with the conviction that under existing conditions reinforcements from England for the conduct of a first-class war would not be forthcoming, have multiplied the difficulties of our military authorities in India. Russia, on the other hand, is financially as well as socially embarrassed. For the moment, therefore, a truce suits both parties. This truce, if fixed for a long enough period, and if adhered to by Russia in spirit as well as in letter, might have far-reaching effect, for it might help to demonstrate, what has long been held in certain quarters, that the rivalry of Britain and Russia in Asia is artificial, and not due to conflict of essential interests. There has always appeared to be something unnatural in Russia's endeavour to disregard the geographical considerations that separate her territory from India. The great mountainous backbone which bulks so largely in this volume divides Asia ethnographically, economically, strategically, and politically, and for a Power whose home is in the north to aspire to rule in the south is surely outrageous to one's sense of the fitness of things. A great military saving in Turkestan, and a quiet period of development of resources in much wealthier regions, might bring home to Russia a realisation of this view, and make ultimately for that friendship between the two nations which appears perfectly compatible with their economic interests. With Germany, in almost every phase of our national activity, we are in conflict; with Russia there is no important point of contact except on the Afghan border. If Russia would only give up the ambitious ideas that embarrass us in India, and that have cost her so much, she would be able to strengthen herself at vital points, while we would be free to consider the new and ominous situation that confronts us in India.

A lesser bone of contention between us has been Persia. Here again it may be said that Russia has never cherished illusions as to the intrinsic value of Persia, but that she merely desired to use it as a stepping-stone in her progress towards the greater goal. We hear of projects which shall score Persia with railways and turn a poor country into a rich one. When at Teheran I had the privilege of meeting M. Naus, then Belgian Director-General of Customs, and he in conversation assured me that a development of the early future would be a railway from the Caspian Sea to Teheran, thence to Meshed, and then across the mountains to link up with the Transcaspian. Either M. Naus thought me very green, or he himself is the greenest man alive, for a more far-fetched scheme could not well be conceived. I have already propounded the view that the building of railways would be only to add further to the long list of disasters that mark commercial enterprise in Persia. There is always the great ring of mountains to be passed ere the central plateau is reached; being there, long tracts of desert separate the comparatively tiny areas of cultivation; while the limited water prohibits material expansion of cultivation. It needs no argument to suggest that railways as paying propositions have no place in Persia.

Strategic railways are another matter. If a line were constructed from the Caucasus to the Beluchistan border, and another from Transcaspia to Seistan, it is clear that Russia would have a new and comparatively easy road to India, besides the possibility of a seaport on the Persian Gulf. What seems important to emphasise is that Russian railway enterprise in Persia is inalienably associated with military designs on India. One exception there is. At Julfa on the Transcaucasian and Persian borders terminates a branch of the Russian Caucasian railway system, and its extension to Tabriz,

the most important commercial centre in Persia, and only eighty miles distant, must soon be expected. At Julfa the Araxes river would have to be bridged, after which construction would be simple, as the ascent of some 2000 feet to Tabriz is easy and gradual. Beyond Tabriz assert themselves those conditions likely ever to prevent the extension of the railway.

In view of its disturbed condition it is important that Russia and ourselves should be in agreement in regard to Persia. Trouble means the possibility of armed intervention by Russia, and the establishing of a still greater degree of ascendency at Teheran than she even now possesses. An outbreak on the Turkish frontier might give the excuse for the entry of troops, while a revolution at the capital would entail measures for the protection of Europeans. We would be helpless in the latter contingency, and only Russian soldiers would be available. The Oriental hates the presence of foreign troops, and to get rid of them and to save his face he will make heavy sacrifices. The outcome of occurrences which led to military intervention by Russia would assuredly be to the detriment of British interests. Any agreement which for the future will clearly bind Russian activity within defined limits will be to our ultimate advantage.

It would seem enough if we secure a guarantee for the integrity of Persia, and recognition of our strategic necessities on the eastern frontier and in the Gulf. We are by treaty already assured of equal commercial opportunity, and delimitation of spheres should not affect our trade. At the present moment Persian affairs are in a state of delicate poise, and any loss of equilibrium finds Russia in a highly advantageous position for influencing the trend of events to her own benefit. Our business is to make terms for the maintenance of the *status quo*, lest worse befall us. As regards the fate of Persia itself we are not greatly concerned. Our trade with her amounts

to about £4,000,000 per annum, and there seems no reason to fear a diminution, while the prospect of an increase belongs to the millenium. Persia is important to us chiefly because it might be utilised as a road to India, and because it is a dangerous point of contact with a rival. Eliminate the strategic danger and decide upon spheres of interest for the future, and it matters little to us whether the Shah continues the misrule of his forefathers, or whether the Mejlis takes over the mismanagement of affairs.

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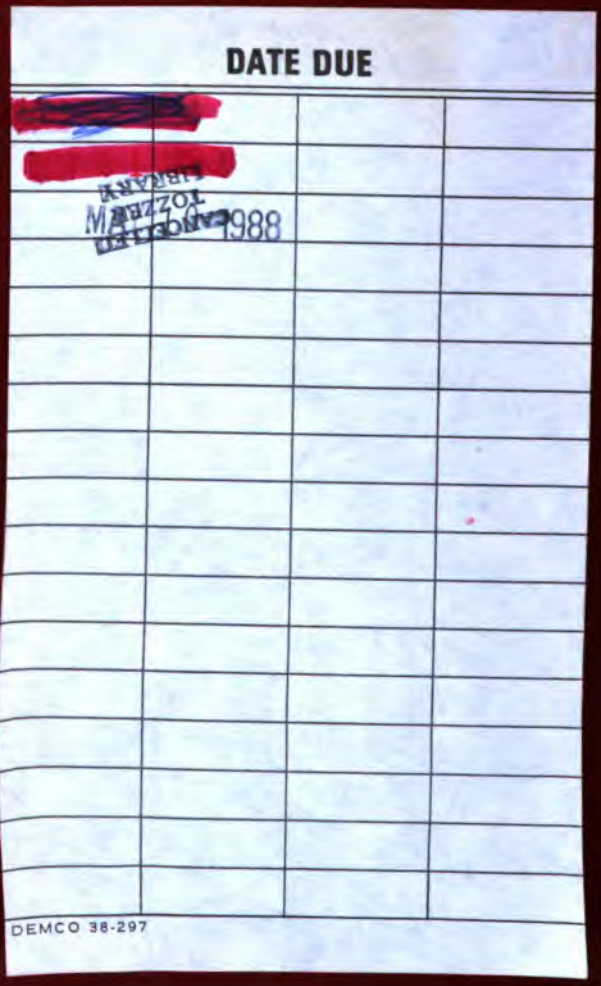
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